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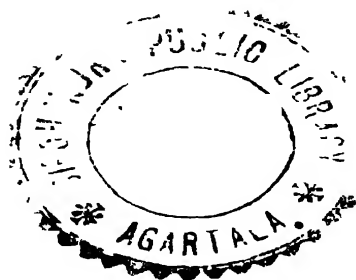
A.D. 2500



# A.D. 2500

## THE OBSERVER

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY  
ANGUS WILSON



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## *Introduction.*

SCIENCE fiction has a large reading public in England, nevertheless it would surprise me if many of its followers were to be found among the regular readers of serious fiction. This, of course, is neither to suggest that the readers of science fiction are not serious-minded people nor to refuse science fiction the epithet serious. Much science fiction is written by persons of high intelligence in a highly intelligent way; rather less, but still a measurable amount has considerable literary merit. It is, on the whole, true, however, that the science fiction which commands respect as writing comes more usually from the United States than from Great Britain. The disinclination of the general reading public to accord merit to good science fiction is in part due, of course, to the great mass of bad, sensational science fiction that appears on the market. Nevertheless the existence of cheap novelettes is not held as a reason for ignoring good novels; there must, therefore, be factors peculiar to all science fiction which repel the general reader. To say that this is only an aspect of the split between humanists and scientists does not, I think, provide a satisfactory

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answer. The best science fiction is, must be, primarily fiction; desirable though accurate scientific content is, science is ultimately only the match to light the novelist's imagination. Science fiction which ends as technical information dressed with a little fantasy or plot can never be any good. No, it is neither the low level of much science fiction nor the technical nature of its contents which puts off the general reader; it is, I believe, the unfamiliar nature of its literary merit. Science fiction is richest in plot, narrative, descriptive fantasy and social irony of a general or philosophical kind; it is poorest in character, psychological sensitivity, dialogue, and, since by its nature it does not deal with the contemporary scene, it is completely deficient in the comedy of contemporary manners. Science fiction at its best, in fact, excels in those literary techniques which readers over the last twenty-five years have been taught by critics to disregard, it is weakest in those aspects which have come to be regarded as the "hall mark" of serious fiction. Apart from its high entertainment value which is so great, it is exactly its excellence in the old virtues of narrative and description which appeal to me as a writer; but, of course, I am often as depressed as the most "highbrow" reader by its naïve characterisation and dialogue. A.D. 2500, a collection of science fiction short stories by writers untouched by the stock conventions of the genre, is refreshing. It should convince many a superior reader that science fiction can be serious literature. In these stories or in many of them, the reader will find



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the qualities he is used to in "good" short stories: the characters are individual, the approach has sensibility, the situations carry their weight of pathos and irony. In short, these stories are humane. Yet, unlike so many of the "sensitive" short stories which are to be found in the usual anthologies, those in A.D. 2500 have excitement derived from narrative, from event, and this is their science fiction virtue.

The most marked difference between the writers of the stories in A.D. 2500 and the mass of professional science fiction writers, even the best, is that the centre of their interest is always individual and human. Of course, all fiction demands that there should be a "principal character" or a group of characters around which the action revolves, but in most science fiction these characters are conventional ciphers; in A.D. 2500 real human beings are at the centre of the situations. The passing of nearly a thousand years, in the eyes of these writers, has no interest except in its effect on individual human lives. Earth then is right at the heart of these stories; the other planets, let alone the solar systems so beloved of space fiction writers, hardly impinge. With one or two notable exceptions, the writers reflect the nostalgia for the present that one would expect from humanists looking back from a thousand years hence; their expectations for humanity are grey or black.

The stories are highly individual, nevertheless one may trace certain strands of interest or of approach that divide them into groups.

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I myself doubt whether science fiction is a subject for humour: to accept any science fantasy demands a certain suspension of laughter and to try to bring it back again means as a rule a straining of effort that comes close to facetiousness. However, if any humorous science fiction succeeds it is surely "Return of the Moon-Man" with its dual note of parody—of space fantasy and of Welsh fiction. Other readers, however, may prefer the sad, ironic, "The Case of Omega Smith" or "Hitch Hike to Paradise", a snook cocked at Olympus. Somewhere strangely between farce, comedy and horror comes the pleasing "Venus and the Rabbit".

The pathos of humanity in the future, I have already said, is the keynote of the collection. One group of stories, among which are some of the best in the book, sees this from an unusual, if somewhat egocentric, angle—the pathos of ourselves today in the control of the various time devices of our descendants. The future exploits us vilely in those two excellent, distressing stories "Not for an Age" and "Another Antigone"; only in the moving "Voice from the Gallery" does the future take pity on our feebleness. Again—and this is surely a very English note—two stories sound the pathos that surrounds elderly ladies with the emotions of our age caught in the grip of a future world more rational, less humane than our own. In "The Knitting" the heroine is just a nice old English lady, but in "The Shadow Play" we may feel that we are witnessing the martyrdom of Mrs. Ramsay or even Mrs. Woolf herself at the hands of posterity. The sinister religious note in totalitarianism forms

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the theme of "Jackson Wong's Story" and "The Blond Kid". Social satire turns on to another sort of totalitarianism in the horrifying "Spud Failure Definite". For readers who feel that the scientific note in the anthology is not strong enough "Alpha and Omega", with its fusion of cybernetics and palaeontology, may make amends. "The Three Brothers" combines science fiction with an elegant mock classical fable form in a unique manner. In my opinion, however, the two most interesting stories are those which attempt to explore the emotions of individuals in the future. Each is concerned with more subtle tendencies in the contemporary human soul as the basis of their future world; each succeeds in giving great pathos to an individual decision. These two stories attempt to imagine a future which is not just externally different, but different in kind for the individual and yet what they describe seems entirely to spring from forces that underlie our life today. It is only by such imaginative effort that science fiction can really become a serious contribution to literature. Both these stories—"Walkabout" and "The Right Thing"—seem to me to vindicate science fantasy from all the charges of the superior.

ANGUS WILSON.



# *Return of the Moon Man*

E. L. MALPASS

A.D. 2500.

That was the year they brought the Electric to Penny-Graig Farm.

Wonderful it was, when Grandfather Griffiths pressed down the switch, and the great farm kitchen was flooded with light. There was Dai my father, and mother, blinking and grinning in the light, and Electric Plumber Williams, smug as you please, looking as though he had invented the Electric himself and sent it through the pipes. Only Gran was sad. Tears streaming down her face, she picked up the old paraffin lamp and carried it sadly out into the scullery.

That was funny about Gran. She was progressive, and left to herself she would have filled the house with refrigerators and atomic cookers and washers. But Grandfather called these things devil's inventions, and would have none of them. And yet, when Grandfather at last agreed to the Electric, Gran was in tears. Reaction, Auntie Space-Ship-Repairs Jones said it was.

"Well," roared Grandfather. "There's your Electric. But don't think that because you've talked me into this

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you'll talk me into any more of these devil's inventions. Let no one mention the words space-ship in my presence ever again."

That was intended for Gran. In her black clothes she was a rather pathetic-looking little woman, and no match at all for her fiery husband. But one thing she had always insisted that she wanted; a space-ship; and it had been a source of argument between them for years.

I tell you all this that you may know that we of Pen-y-Graig are not the backward savages that some people would have you believe. We are in touch with modern thought, even though we are apt to cling to the old ways. But what I really remember of those far-off, golden days of 2500 is of how the first Expedition to the Moon set off, and of how it landed in Ten Acre Field, and of the strange events that followed.

Men had been trying to set off for the Moon for years, perhaps for centuries. But you know how it is. Something always happened to stop them. The weather was bad, or someone's auntie died, or there was an eclipse. In the autumn of 2500, however, they were ready at last.

It was cold that evening, and we were sitting by the fire, enjoying the Electric. Grandfather was listening in; suddenly he jumps to his feet and shouts, "Blasphemy."

No one took much notice, for if the old man didn't jump up and shout "Blasphemy" at least once of an evening Gran thought he was sickening and gave him a purge.

So Gran said dutifully, "What is it, Mortimer?"

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"Flying to the Moon, they are," he cried. "The spaceship has just left London. And they're dancing in the streets, and exploding fireworks in celebration. Sodom and——"

But at that moment there was a noise as of a great wind passing over, and then a terrible crash as though someone had picked up all our milk churns and dropped them on the Dutch barn. We ran outside, and there, in Ten Acre Field, a Thing was glinting in the frosty moonlight. Huge it was, like a great shining rocket.

Grandfather looked at it. "Lost their way, maybe," he said with malicious satisfaction. Then he felt in his waistcoat pocket and took out a card and put it in my hand.

"Run you, Bronwen," he said, "and give them the business card of Uncle Space-Ship-Repairs Jones."

But I was frightened, being but a little girl then, and clung to my mother's skirts. So Dai, my father, started up the tractor without a word, and rode off to fetch Uncle Space-Ship-Repairs Jones.

Down to the farm came the Moon Men, as the newspapers called them, their helmets bright in the moonlight, and soon Dai my father arrived. My uncle was sitting on the tractor with him, clutching a great spanner and grinning as pleased as Punch, and soon his banging and hammering came across the still air from Ten Acre.

One of the Moon Men took off his great helmet.

"Bit my tongue when we landed sudden," he said.

"Nothing to what you will bite when you land on the Moon," said my grandfather.

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"That is what I am thinking," the man replied. "And that is why I say they can have their old Moon. Back to Golders Green by first train it is for me."

The leader took off his helmet at that. "Go to the Moon one short?" he cried. "That would never do."

"I will go in his place," said Dai my father quietly.

"You go? Never," roared my grandfather. "No son of mine shall go gallivanting round among the planets."

My father flushed angrily. But no one argued with Grandfather, and at that moment we heard Uncle Space-Ship-Repairs Jones hollering that the Moon-Ship was now as right as ninepence.

The Moon Men, all except the one who had bitten his tongue, set off for Ten Acre.

"I will come and see you off," said Grandfather, and we watched him walk up the hill with the men.

With a great roar the Moon-Ship rose into the sky, and climbed among the stars. Soon we could see it no more.

"Supper now," said Gran.

We got the meal ready, and then someone said, "Where is Grandfather?"

All the grown-ups looked uneasy, and suddenly I was frightened and began to cry.

"Gone to talk to the old bull, maybe," said Gran.

Silently my father picked up the lantern and went out into the fields. It was a long time before he came back.

"Gone," he said. "Clean as a whistle."

No one said anything.

• Grandfather did not come back all night.



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Nor the next day.

Gran was worried.

Then, at dusk, Read-All-About-It Evans, instead of dropping our evening papers from his helicopter as he flew past, landed. He marched into the house and thrust the paper under my father's nose, and said, "See you."

"Octogenarian on Moon," said big headlines. Then, below: "Radio flash from Moon party, says Mortimer Griffiths, elderly Welsh farmer, took place of member of crew injured in earth landing."

"Well, there is sly for you," said my father. "Going out for five minutes and finishing up on the Moon."

Gran said nothing. But she went to the pegs and got her coat and went out of the door.

"Go with her, Bronwen," my father ordered me, but kindly.

When I got outside it was almost dark, but a big, full Moon was just swinging clear of the hill, and I could see Gran going along the path that leads up Break Back and past Ten Acre and brings you to the Little Mountain. Though I was only a child I knew where Gran was going, and why. At the top of Little Mountain she would be nearer to the Moon than anywhere. I also felt, child though I was, that she would want to be alone, so I followed quietly, at a short distance.

Sure enough, Gran kept on up the mountain, and at last we were on the top place where there is nothing but broken rocks, and holes of black water, and lonely old ghosts. And the Moon was well up now, and so

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near that you felt that if you stood on tiptoe you could touch it like an apple on the tree.

Gran looked at the Moon. And the Moon looked at Gran.

Now Grandfather was a big man, and I knew she was hoping to see him, perhaps putting up a little tent, or lighting a Primus. But there was no sign of anyone on the Moon's face. And at last, after a long time, Gran shivered and sighed. Then she muttered, "Round at the back, maybe," and she turned and came slowly down the mountain. And though she must have seen me she said no word.

The next night the same thing happened. At moon-rise Gran set off for the mountain, and I followed. But this time the Moon was not quite round, and Gran looked at it for a long time. Then she said, "Shrinking it is," and came home again.

This happened every night. The Moon grew thinner and thinner, and Gran went out later and later. Young though I was, they let me stay up till all hours to follow Gran up the mountain. But at last the Moon rose so late that Dai my father said, "Bed for you to-night, my girl."

But I awoke in the small hours, and looked out, and there was the Moon, a thin, silver sickle, and there was the yellow light of a lantern climbing the dark side of the sleeping mountain.

I put on my coat and ran out into the cold.

When I reached the top of the mountain Gran was there. To my surprise she spoke to me. Pointing to the thin crescent she said, "Hanging on by his finger-

## RETURN OF THE MOON MAN

nails now he will be," and she took my hand and led me home.

The next evening she said to my father, "What time does the Moon rise to-night, Dai?"

My father looked at the paper.

"There is no Moon to-night, Gran," he said.

"No Moon," repeated Gran in a voice of death. "No Moon." She rose, and hung a black cloth over the big picture of Grandfather at the Eisteddfod.

"Falling through the sky he will be now," she said slowly, as though speaking to herself. "Like a shooting star he will fall, and like a shooting star he will cease to be." She went back to her chair and sat down, her hands folded in her lap.

"But the fact that you can't see the Moon doesn't mean it isn't there," my father explained. "It's just that the sun is shining on the other side of it."

Gran gave him a look. "Black midnight," she cried. "Black midnight, and you talk to me of sunshine. Open the door." She pointed an ancient finger at it. "And, if the sun is shining, run up Snowdon barefoot I will, like the mad woman of Aberdaron."

Dai my father gave up. There was a silence. Then Gran began talking again, almost to herself.

"He was a hard man," she said. "I didn't much care for him. Never would he buy me anything. A space-ship, only a little one, I asked him for, many times.

"'No mention of space-ships in the Lives of the Great Saints,' he says, smiling nasty, putting the tips of his fingers together, smug as you please.

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" 'No mention of indoor sanitation either,' I say, real angry now. 'But that do not stop Rev. Williams having a little room up at the Manse.'"

"But it was no good. There was no arguing with Mortimer Griffiths." She rose, and went to bed. And the next day she left for Aberystwyth and married Llewellyn Time Machine.

They went to 1904 for their honeymoon. And two days after they had gone Grandfather came back from the Moon.

"Finished the harvest?" he asked.

"Yes," said my father.

"Have you mended the fence in Ten Acre?"

"Never mind the fence in Ten Acre," said my father.

"Gran has married Llewellyn Time Machine."

That was a terrible moment. For a long time my grandfather stood stroking his beard. Then suddenly he shot out his long arm and grasped a chopper.

"Where are they?" he roared. "Where are they?"

My father, pale, said nothing.

Grandfather seized him by the throat and shook him.

"Where are they?" he repeated.

"In—in 1904," gasped my father.

Grandfather let him go. "Get the tractor out," he ordered.

"Where are you going?"

"1904," said Grandfather.

He was gone for nearly a week.

Then he came back, alone. He was in a good mood, quite talkative for him.

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"Hired a Time Machine in Llandudno," he said, beaming. "Chased them right back to the Middle Ages. Llewellyn caught the Black Death. And I smashed his Time Machine to pieces with my little chopper."

"And Gran?" asked my father.

"Stranded in the Middle Ages, with no money, and no means of getting back," said Grandfather with immense satisfaction. "She was taking the veil when I last saw her. Damp, the nunnery looked. Damp and cold.

"Teach her to go hankering after space-ships," said my grandfather.

# Not For An Age

BRIAN W. ALDISS

*He was not for an age, but for all time.*—BEN JONSON.

A BED-SPRING groaned and pinged, mists cleared, Rodney Furnell awoke out of a dreamless sleep. From the bathroom next door came the crisp sound of shaving: his son was up. The bed next to his was empty: Valerie, his second wife, was up. Guiltily, Rodney also rose, and performed several timid exercises to flex his backbone. Youth! When it was going it had to be husbanded. He touched his toes.

The audience had its first laugh there.

By the time Rodney had got into his Sunday suit, Valerie's cuckoo clock was chuckling nine. When he entered their gay little kitchenette Valerie and Jim (Rodney had conscientiously shunned a literary name for his only offspring) were already at the cornflakes.

More laughter at the first sight of that antiquated twentieth-century modernity.

"Hello, both! Lovely morning," he boomed, kissing Valerie's forehead. The September sun, in fact, was making a fair showing through damp mist: a man of

forty-two instinctively arms himself with enthusiasm when facing a wife fifteen years younger.

The audience always loved the day's meals, murmuring with delight as each quaint accessory—toaster, teapot, sugar-tongs—was used.

Valerie looked fresh and immaculate, Jim sported an open-necked shirt and was attentive to his stepmother. At nineteen, he was too manly, and too attentive. . . . He shared the Sunday paper companionably with her, chatting about the theatre and books. Sometimes Rodney could join in about one of the books. Under the notion that Valerie disliked seeing him in spectacles, he refrained from reading at breakfast.

How the audience roared later when he slipped them on in his study! How he hated that audience! How fervently he wished that he had the power to raise even one eyebrow in scorn of them!

The day wore on exactly as it had done for over a thousand times, unable to deviate in the slightest from its original course. So it would go on and on, as meaningless as a cliché, or a tune endlessly repeated: for the benefit of these fools who stood on all four sides and laughed at the silliest things.

At first, Rodney had been frightened. This power to snatch them all as it were from the grave had seemed something occult. Then, becoming accustomed to it, he had been flattered. That these wise beings had wanted to review *his* day, disinter *his* modest life . . . it was balm only for a time. Rodney soon discovered he was only a glorified side-show at some latter-day fair, a

butt for fools and not an edification for philosophers.

He walked in the tumbledown garden with Valerie, his arm round her waist. The North Oxford air was mild and sleepy, the neighbours' radio was off.

"Have you got to go and see that desiccated old Regius Professor, darling?" she asked.

"You know I must." He conquered his irritation and added, "We'll go for a drive after lunch—just you and I."

He kissed Valerie, he hoped elegantly, the audience tittered, and he stepped into the garage. His wife returned to the house, and Jim. What happened in there he would never know, however many times the day was repeated. There was no way of confirming his suspicion that his son was in love with Valerie and she attracted to him. She should have enough sense to prefer a mature man to a stripling of nineteen; besides, it was only eighteen months since he had been referred to in print as "one of our promising young men of *literæ historicæ*."

Rodney could have walked round to Septuagint College. But because the car was new and something that his don's salary would hardly stretch to, he preferred to drive. The watchers, of course, shrieked with laughter at the sight of his Morris tep. He occupied himself, as he polished the windscreen, with hating the audience and all inhabitants of this future world.

That was the strange thing. There was room in the corner of the old Rodney's mind for the new Rodney's ghost. He depended on the old Rodney—the Rodney who had actually lived that fine, autumn day—for vision, motion, all the paraphernalia of life, but he could occupy



independently a tiny cell of his consciousness. He was a helpless observer carried over and over in a cockpit of the past.

The irony of it lay there. He would have been spared all this humiliation if he did not know what was happening. But he did know, trapped though he was in an unknowing shell.

Even to Rodney, a history man and no scientist, the broad outline of what had happened was obvious enough. Somewhen in the future, man had ferreted out the secret of literally reclaiming the past. Bygone years lay in the rack of antiquity like film spools in a library. Like film spools, they were not amenable to change, but might be played over and over on a suitable projector. Rodney's autumn day was being played over and over.

He had reflected helplessly on the situation so often that the horror of it had worn thin. That day had passed, quietly, trivially, had been forgotten; suddenly long afterwards, it had been whipped back among the things that were. Its actions, even its thoughts, had been reconstituted, with only Rodney's innermost ego free to suffer from the imposition. How unsuspecting he had been then! How inadequate every one of his gestures seemed now, performed twice, ten, a hundred, a thousand times!

Had he been as smug every day as he was that day? And what had happened after that day? Having, naturally, no knowledge of the rest of his life then, he had none now. If he had been happy with Valerie for much longer, if his recently published work on feudal

justice had been acclaimed, were questions he could pose without answering.

A pair of Valerie's gloves lay on the back seat of the car; Rodney threw them into a locker with an éclat quite divorced from his inner impotence. She, poor dear bright thing, was in the same predicament. In that they were united, although powerless to express the union in any slightest flicker of expression.

He drove slowly down Banbury Road. As ever, there were four sub-divisions of reality. There was the external world of Oxford; there were Rodney's original abstracted observations as he moved through the world; there were the ghost thoughts of the 'present-I', bitter and frustrated; there were the half-seen faces of the future which advanced or receded aimlessly. The four blended indefinitely, one becoming another in Rodney's moments of near madness. (What would it be like to be insane, trapped in a sane mind?)

Sometimes he caught snatches of talk from the on-lookers. They at least varied from day to day. "If he knew what he looked like!" they would exclaim. Or, "Do you see her hair-do?" Or, "Can you beat that for a slum!" Or, "Mummy, what's that funny brown thing he's eating?" Or—how often he heard that one—"I just wish he knew we were watching him!"

Church bells were solmenly ringing as he pulled up outside Septuagint and switched off the ignition. Soon he would be in that fusty study, taking a glass of something with the creaking old Regius Professor. For the nth time he would be smiling a shade too much as the

grip of ambition outreached the hand of friendship. His mind leapt ahead and back and ahead and back again in a frenzy. Oh, if he could only *do* something! So the day would pass. Finally, the night would come—one last gust of derision at Valerie's night-dress and his pyjamas!—and then oblivion.

Oblivion . . . that lasted an eternity but took no time at all. . . . And *they* wound the reel back and started it all over again.

He was pleased to see the Regius Professor. The Regius Professor was pleased to see him. Yes, it was a nice day. No, he hadn't been out of college since, let's see, it must be the summer before last. And then came that line that drew the biggest laugh of all; Rodney said, inevitably, "Oh, we must all hope for some sort of immortality."

To have to say it again, to have to say it not a shade less glibly than when it had first been said, and when the wish had been granted already in such a ludicrous fashion! If only he might die first, if only the film would break down!

And then the film did break down.

The universe flickered to a standstill and faded into dim purple. Temperature and sound slid down to zero. Rodney Furnell stood transfixed, his arms extended in the middle of a gesture, a wine-glass in his right hand. The flicker, the purple, the zero-ness cut down through him; but even as he sensed himself beginning to fade, a great fierce hope was born within him. With a burst of

avidity, the ghost of him took over the old Rodney. Confidence flooded him as he fought back the negativity.

The wine-glass vanished from his hand. The Regius Professor sank into twilight and was gone. Blackness reigned. Rodney turned round. It was a voluntary movement: *it was not in the script*: he was alive, free.

The bubble of twentieth-century time had burst, leaving him alive in the future. He stood in the middle of a black and barren area. There had evidently been a slight explosion. Overhead was a crane-like affair as big as a locomotive with several funnels protruding from its underside; smoke issued from one of the funnels. Doubtless the thing was a time-projector or whatever it might be called, and obviously it had blown a valve.

The scene about him engaged all Rodney's attention. He was delighted to see that his late audience had been thrown into mild panic by the sudden collapse of the chimera. They shouted and pushed and—in one quarter—fought vigorously. Male and female alike, they wore featureless, transparent bags which encased them from neck to ankle: and they had had the impertinence to laugh at his pyjamas!

Cautiously, Rodney moved away. At first, the idea of liberty overwhelmed him, he could scarcely believe himself alive. Then the realisation came: his liberty was precious—how doubly precious after that most terrible form of captivity!—and he must guard it by flight. He hurried beyond the projection area, pausing at a great sign that read:

NOT FOR AN AGE

*CHRONOARCHÆOLOGY LTD. PRESENTS—  
THE SIGHTS OF THE CENTURIES  
COME AND ENJOY THE ANTICS OF YOUR ANCESTORS!  
YOU'LL LAUGH AS YOU LEARN.*

And underneath: Please Take One:

Shaking, Rodney seized a gaudy folder and stuffed it into his pocket. Then he ran.

His guess about the fairground was correct, and Valerie and he had been merely a glorified 'What the Butler Saw'. Gigantic booths towered on all sides. Gay crowds sauntered or stood, taking little notice as Rodney passed. Flags flew, silvery music sounded; near-by a flashing sign begged:

*TRY ANTI-GRAY AND REALISE YOUR DREAMS*

further, a banner proclaimed:

*THE SINISTER V'VUSIANS ARE HERE!*

Fortunately, a gateway was close. Dreading a detaining hand on his arm, Rodney made for it as quickly as possible. He passed a towering structure before which a queue of people gazed impatiently up at the words:

*SAVOUR THE EROTIC POSSIBILITIES OF FREE-FALL*

and came to the entrance.

An attendant called "Hi!" and made to stop him. Rodney broke into a run. He ran down a satin-smooth

road until exhaustion overcame him. A metal object shaped vaguely like a shoe but as big as a small bungalow stood in the kerb. Through its windows, Rodney saw couches and no human beings. Thankful at the mute offer of rest and concealment, he climbed in.

As he sank, sinking on to yielding rubber-foam, he realised what a horrible situation he was in. To be stranded centuries ahead of his own lifetime—and death—in a world of super-technology and barbarism!—for so he visualised it. However, it was a vast improvement on the repetitive nightmare he had recently endured. Chiefly, now, he needed time to think quietly.

“Are you ready to proceed, sir?”

Rodney jumped up, startled by a voice so near him. Nobody was in sight. The interior resembled a coach’s, with wide soft seats, all of which were empty.

“Are you ready to proceed, sir?” There it was again.

“Who is that?” Rodney asked.

“This is Auto-moto Seven Six One Mu at your service, sir, awaiting instructions to proceed.”

“You mean away from here?”

“Certainly, sir.”

“Yes, please!”

At once the structure was gliding smoothly forward. No noise, no vibration. The gaudy fairground fell back and was replaced by other buildings, widely spaced, smokeless, mainly built of a substance which looked like curtain fabric; they flowed by without end.

“Are you—are we heading for the country?” Rodney asked.

"This is the country, sir. Do you require a city?"

"No, I don't. What is there beside city and country?"

"Nothing, sir—except of course the sea fields."

Dropping that line of questioning, Rodney, who was instinctively addressing a busy control board at the front of the vehicle, inquired, "Excuse my asking, but are you a—er, robot?"

"Yes, sir, Auto-moto Seven Six One Mu. New on this route, sir."

Rodney breathed a sigh of relief. He could not have faced a human being, but irrationally felt superior to a mere mechanical. Pleasant voice it had, no more grating certainly than the Professor of Anglo-Saxon at his old college . . . however long ago that was.

"What year is this?" he asked.

"Circuit Zero, Epoch Eighty Two, new style. Year Two Thousand Five Hundred Anno Domini, old style."

It was the first direct confirmation of all his suspicions: there was no gainsaying that level voice.

"Thanks," he said, hollowly. "Now if you don't mind I've got to think."

Thought, however, yielded little in comfort or results. Possibly the wisest course would be to throw himself on the mercy of some civilised authority—if there were any civilised authorities left. And would the wisest course in a twentieth-century world be the wisest in a—um, twenty-sixth century world?

"Driver, is Oxford in existence?"

"What is Oxford, sir?"

A twinge of anxiety as he asked, "This is England?"

"Yes, sir. I have found Oxford in my directory, sir. It is a motor and space-ship factory in the Midlands, sir."

"Just keep going."

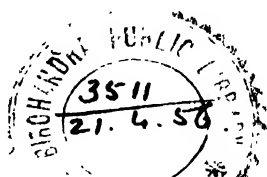
Dipping into his pocket, he produced the fun-fair brochure and scanned its bright lettering, hoping for a clue to action.

"Chronoarchæology Ltd. present a staggering series of Peeps into the Past. Whole days in the lives of: (a) A Mother Dinosaur, (b) William the Conqueror's Wicked Nephew, (c) A Citizen of Crazy, Plague-Ridden Stuart London, (d) A Twentieth-Century Teacher in Love.

"Nothing expurgated, nothing added! Better than the Feelies! All in glorious 4D—no stereos required."

Fuming at the description of himself, Rodney crumpled the brochure in his hand. He wondered bitterly how many of his own generation were helplessly enduring this gross irreverence in peepshows all over the world. When the sense of outrage abated slightly, curiosity reasserted itself; he smoothed out the folder and read a brief description of the process which "will give you history-sterics as it brings each era nearer".

Below the heading "It's Fabulous—It's Pabulous!" he read, "Just as anti-gravity lifts a man against the direction of weight, chrono-grab can lift a machine out of the direction of time and send it speeding back over the dark centuries. It can be accurately guided from the present to scoop up a fragment from the past, slapping that fragment—all unknown to the people in it—right





into your lucky laps. The terrific expense of this intricate operation need hardly be emphas——"

"Driver!" Rodney screamed. "Do you know anything about this time-grabbing business?"

"Only what I have heard, sir."

"What do you mean by that?"

"My built-in information centre contains only facts relating to my duty, sir, but since I also have learning circuits I am occasionally able to collect gossip from passengers which——"

"Tell me this, then, can human beings as well as machines travel back in time?"

The buildings were still flashing by, silent, hostile in the unknown world. Drumming his fingers wildly on his seat, Rodney awaited an answer.

"Only machines, sir. Humans can't live backwards."

For a long time he lay and cried comfortably. The automoto made solacing cluck-cluck noises, but it was a situation with which it was incompetent to deal.

At last, Rodney wiped his eyes on his sleeve, the sleeve of his Sunday suit, and sat up. He directed the driver to head for the main offices of Chronoarchæology and slumped back in a kind of stupor. Only at the headquarters of that fiendish invention might there be people who could—if they would—restore him to his own time.

Rodney dreaded the thought of facing any creature of this unscrupulous age. He pressed the idea away, and concentrated instead on the peace and orderliness of the world from which he had been resurrected. To

## NOT FOR AN AGE

see Oxford again, 'to see Valerie. . . . Dear, dear Valerie. . . .

„Would they help him at Chronoarchæology? Or—*supposing the people at the fairground repaired their devilish apparatus before he got there.* . . . What would happen then he shuddered to imagine.

“Faster, driver,” he shouted.

The wide-spaced buildings became a wall.

“Faster, driver,” he screamed.

The wall became a mist.

“We are doing mach 2.3, sir,” said the driver calmly.

“Faster!”

The mist became a scream.

“We are about to crash, sir.”

They crashed. Blackness, merciful, complete.

A bed-spring groaned and pinged, mists cleared, Rodney Furnell awoke out of a dreamless sleep. From the bathroom next door came the crisp, repetitive sound of shaving: his son was up. The bed next to his was empty: Valerie was up. Guiltily, Rodney also rose. . . .

# *The Right Thing*

WILLIAM ANDREW

NEAR the top of the long staircase Hilde faltered, took a few more steps, and then stopped. Her mother and father turned and when she moved out of the crowd on to one of the railed recess platforms which looked down the hillside and across the darkening valley, they joined her anxiously.

She was conscious of their presence only as an added irritant, for her thoughts were tangled by the decision she had to make, a conflict of desire and obligation, she judged. Well schooled as she had been in the relationship between the two, and the precedence which they should take in her life, she found herself at a loss, and irked by her Credentian teachers. It is fact and fantasy, she reflected, and her confusion increased.

"Are you unwell?" her mother asked.

"Yes, I am," she replied quickly. "My head—and I am giddy." Her mother looked at her father, and impatiently Hilde waited through the hiatus of Credentian deliberation.

The stream of men and women moved past them up the staircase. A stream of black and grey, the women

## THE RIGHT THING

in huge bell-like dresses and halo bonnets, the men in their severely-cut suits and tall hats. She looked up and saw they were very near to the summit of The Hill. The stream was spilling over into the immense bowl of the auditorium, cut out of the hill-top by an explosion many years before, during one of the Global wars. The crater was therefore held to have a claim to antiquity, and terraced and strengthened it was used by the Credentes for all their gatherings.

Her father spoke in the deep slow voice which was so like that of all the older men in the settlement. "If Hilde is unwell then she must return home and listen to the ceremony there."

"Very well, Father, if you think it is the right thing," Hilde replied. Her mother laid her hand on her arm solicitously, and for a moment seemed about to offer to return with her, but since her husband had not mentioned that measure she merely watched as her daughter began her descent.

It was an aggravatingly slow descent, now that her decision had been made, against the crowd as they strained upward. Her hooped skirt caught and buffeted those of the women she passed; after she had to grip the hand-rail to prevent herself falling, and as often she panicked with a fear that the press of people would catch her and carry her before it, and tip her over the edge above.

In the blur of faces there would be nods and looks of surprised interest from those who knew her. She blundered on. Once she knocked a woman's prayer-

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book from her hand and it shattered into pink and white plaster fragments on the stone step. The blur resolved itself into one aggrieved full-moon face, grotesque in its frame of black ribbon. Hilde gave away her own prayer-book, exultant for the moment at such a gesture.

Soon, with her huge skirt held high, she was running along the main street of tiny mushroom-shaped houses towards her home.

But one man who had greeted her and been ignored, turned. Tall and thin-faced, he stood for some time after she had disappeared into a side-street. The last of the congregation had passed him when, still standing there, he caught sight of a woman's figure, her head now covered by a shawl, cross from one side of the main street to the other. As the music began to blare out above him, he ran down the steps. He knew that the length of his pace would overtake any girl, hampered as she must be by her Credentian habit, and he started to dodge in and out the intricate street pattern, to head her off.

The little mushroom houses were at their best in this misty half-light of a winter evening; their architect would have been proud of them, for, with their tiny window patches of yellow light shining out into the night, they had exactly the elfin atmosphere of mystic sanctity that had been desired. Inside, the very old people of the community, who could not climb The Hill were listening as the loudspeakers dinned out the beginning of the musical praise.

The sound, too, was all around him as he ran, drown-

## THE RIGHT THING

ing the sound of his footsteps, and he was grateful for this, for he was still afraid of their rhythm.

When at last he reached the side gate where he had hoped to find Hilde, he found she had already passed through, and was climbing the path that led into the range of hills behind the settlement.

He could have hailed her, but her purposefulness prevented him, and his curiosity took command. All the uneasy thought and glances which he had noticed in the past few weeks had been translated into the bustling movement of flight, and he wanted to know the reason.

Now he was following her across hard-baked earth, which had been scorched by some weapon many years before, it was supposed, in the same conflagration as that which had shaped the crater in The Hill. At this height there was no grass and the ground was ridged as if frozen; occasionally he passed trees stunted and petrified into twisted leaf-like patterns, like the old cast-iron work specimens of which the Credentes were so proud. There was nothing else to break the smooth incline.

In spite of her encumbrances Hilde set a strong pace, and she did not glance behind, though often he saw her looking downhill anxiously. The climb began to lose its reality for him, the figure sweeping silently ahead of him, the grotesquely postured arms of the trees emerging from the mist, and his own increasing fatigue.

And then Hilde disappeared. In a moment when he stopped and stood precariously on the treacherous surface to gather his breath, the mist enveloped her. He

broke into a scrambling run in the direction she had taken, and suddenly rose above the mist bank.

Across to the right he saw The Hill, and the arc of light that it threw into the air like the glow of a volcano; the music—but above it he heard voices.

An old concrete look-out post just above him showed a yellow light through its blackened slit mouth.

As he entered Hilde stretched up her arms to douse the light, but he had already taken in the scene, the mattress in one corner, a bundle of Hilde's belongings on the filth of the floor, and Hilde herself, surprised and afraid. "Joseph," she cried.

She withdrew her hands and the light fell on the other figure, a tall, heavily built young man with tousled fair hair. His eyes were narrow and Eastern, and he was dressed entirely in leather. He turned and looked at Hilde inquiringly. "It's Joseph, a friend of my father's," she said shakily. The young man's shoulders were hunched forward aggressively, and the fingers of his right hand drummed on the side of his thigh.

As the two men inspected each other with contempt, Hilde felt herself thrown back into the fear and indecision of the moment on the steps when she had first been committed to leaving the settlement. Now, as then, she took refuge in blind action. "This is Sigis, Joseph." She had expected her father's expression of reproach for such an occasion. The Credentian law had been violated—a woman had left the settlement unaccompanied, and had met and spoken to an outsider. But Joseph only glanced at the mattress.

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She saw his glance and in anger her decision crystallised. "We are leaving together, to-night."

"Where are you going?" he asked, and his tone was not what she had expected either.

"To Sigis's home."

"To which warren does your friend belong?"

Hilde turned on him viciously, her plain, square face red, and her voice raucous with scorn. "Why should *you* speak like that? Standing there like a magnificent page from a history book!" She heard Sigis laugh, for they had often spoken about the ludicrous Credentian habit. "And coming from that musty nest of the past down there. What claim have you to judge the outside world, when that is your home? What shocks you is that I am a woman and a woman must always curtsy in this great cage of a thing to the man's opinion. The Father! Well, I have lost my little stone prayer-book that is the nearest thing to a Bible that we are trusted with. Does that destroy my goodness?"

"No, but the life you are going to will."

"What do you know of the life I am going to?"

"What do *you* know of it?"

"I know that Sigis will be with me, and I shall matter, even if it is difficult."

"It will not be difficult, not at all. It is the easiest life imaginable and safe since it is underground. I am sure Sigis has told you how simple it is, and uncomplicated. Uncomplicated even by marriage vows."

"That isn't true."

"I know that it is true, that, whatever city you go to,



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you will be the only married woman there. Nor do I know who will marry you unless you go to a Credentian settlement and your position would be difficult to explain."

She looked at Sigis. "Of course, it isn't true."

He shook his head. "There is a man who will marry us in New London."

Joseph smiled. "Marrying is an illicit activity. It will be a very furtive ceremony, I'm afraid, Hilde. You must resign yourself to that. Your music will be the fast rhythmic beat of a drum. That will be the music for everything you do in New London—or any other city. It will reach out at you from all the surface entrances and in every tunnel and every apartment, work or play; its accents will throb into your mind until they become a part of you, like your heartbeat or the pulse of the blood of your body." He paused. "Soon you will need it for sanity's sake. Look at your friend's right hand."

Involuntarily she looked down. Sigis shrugged and turned awkwardly away to pick up his belongings, but not before she had seen his jerking fingers. She too bent to adjust the fastenings of her own bundle, but in that movement she was very conscious of the moment, the distant music from the settlement, Sigis's heavy breathing, but most of all the figure drawn up to all its thin height that was not her father's friend. Her voice still held an uncertain derision as she said, "You don't sound like a Credentian father now."

And he went on, aware of his advantage. "Of course,

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there are apartments, halls where the music is swelled by other instruments, where people dance, singly or together, in an arena, which is a spectacle to see. With your upbringing you should appreciate it in all its novelty. But you want to belong to a community where the woman matters. They do there. In their crude and most bestial function which they perform publicly with anyone who cares to participate, perhaps with some of the Oriental occupation who still linger in the towns." Hilde thought of Sigis's eyes, and pretended she had not understood. "And all the time there is the music. And for the old people there are rooms for them to live and die together." He stopped apparently breathless, but in a stronger light she would have seen his whole body was shivering.

"You should ask," Sigis said, "you should ask this friend of your father's how he knows all this."

They both stood ready to leave, their belongings in their hands. Hilde had drawn her black shawl over her head. She did not want to ask that question, for she had guessed what his answer would be. She did not intend to ask and moved towards the doorway, but before she reached it, Joseph said, "I came to the settlement as a young man, from New London. Your father vouched for me."

Again her doubt, her longing for freedom, an opportunity to be—it couldn't be true! He had exaggerated to prevent her leaving, of course. Sigis was at her elbow, and together they stepped out into the night.

She would have said something to Joseph in farewell,

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but before she could turn, her eye was caught by a shape above her, blotting out the moving lights of the night sky. The Hand of God. She stumbled back into shelter in fright, pointing. Joseph pushed between them and looked up, and she saw the flash of fear in his eyes; beyond him Sigis's face was impassive.

Three fast paces took Joseph below the light which he wrenched from its fitting. He returned to the doorway nursing his scorched hands. Above them a huge circle of the sky was blacked by an object hovering above the hill. A faint whine was audible, now that they listened, and as their eyes became accustomed to the darkness they could see small lights on the underside, and perhaps a shimmer of glass.

"Martian or Venutian," Joseph said. He crouched on one side of the doorway, Hilde and Sigis on the other. The whine increased menacingly as the shape grew lower, so that they could distinguish vibrations within the sound.

"What will it do?" Hilde whispered.

"It may move on."

"Even in Africa," Sigis said, "all the cities are said to live in terror of Venutian attack. They may have weapons we know nothing of."

"To be sure they may have, but what would be the point of their attacking such a poor area as this?" Joseph replied.

To Hilde as she lay in Sigis's arms, his fingers drumming on her shoulder, the position was becoming very clear. Just when her determination to blind action had

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seemed to be carrying her through, this had happened, and in the face of her first physical danger her Credentian teaching came to the surface. The situation, the three of them trapped in this concrete shell by the unknown, was her personal problem. Atonement had to be made.

"At least in the city we will be safe from this," Sigis said, more to her than to Joseph, but in her new mood she allowed Joseph to reply.

"I have never seen one of these craft above our settlement," Joseph said. "It seems to be higher now. Its height varies. Perhaps they can't control it."

Hilde sighed, for his answer was her own. Her sacrifice had to be made; it was demanded because of her folly. She winced at the beat of Sigis's hand, and squirmed out of his reach. In the morning she would go back with Joseph, and, of course, she would have to tell her parents and beg their forgiveness.

Suddenly the whole thing was simpler, simpler than it had been for weeks; only Sigis stood in her way, and he—would accept it. She leant back in the darkness and waited for the whine above to fade away.

# *Jackson Wong's Story*

JOHN BOLSOVER

WHEN do things really begin? Perhaps what happened to me began the day the boss told me the V.I.P.s were coming.

My name is Jackson Wong. I was born in 2482. When I was eighteen, the age when the first industrial tour begins, I was posted to the plankton station on Mona, the first bit of Western Europe to be re-opened. There was some chaff. "What a place!" they said. "A little Welsh island with graveyards all round that you won't even be allowed to fly over."

The V.I.P.s came when I had been there about six months. Of the two who came to my sub-station, one was a doctor of Applied Christology, and the other of Evolutionary Consciousness. I showed them the tanks, and in the dark-room ran through some of my recordings, feeling, as always, a touch of awe as the weaving patterns of infusorial life glowed on the screen, and wondered why such rare birds had really come. I thought it might be to see the holy place near-by, a cromlech called Arthur's Quoit, and I was right.

I ran them there, watched them cross the smooth turf and disappear beneath the capstone, and when they had

## JACKSON WONG'S STORY

seen all they wanted, brought them back, and gave them tea at the Rest House.

I listened hard to their talk. Dr. Hobart Henderson, the evolutionist, said how lucky they were 5,000 years ago. With ego-consciousness almost undeveloped, there was no gap between the self and the not-self; and they felt themselves part of the whole live world. How charming it was when innocence and experience were not contrary states.

Dr. Elmer Solengula, the Christologist, agreed. The trinity of art, science, and religion had not yet disintegrated. There was less superstition then than in the Age of Sleep, which was unable to understand neolithic innocence because unable to believe man anything more than an educated animal. Turning to me he asked, "Why is the last half of the second millenium called the Age of Sleep, Jackson?" I was ready for that one. "Well, sir," I said, "because then men were awake in matter, but asleep to the spirit." "Yes," he said, "they thought it superstition to believe in the supernatural. What are our superstitions to-day, Jackson?" "Why, sir," I replied, "we haven't got any: we are free." Dr. Elmer smiled, and Dr. Hobart laughed.

Soon after that, Dr. Solengula said something I was often to recall. Dr. Henderson had said that the Age of Sleep incubated what the Age of Destruction brought forth, and that we were lucky to have had so long a peace to get over it, and Dr. Solengula had replied that it was a deadly brew; our peace had been recuperative, and that all of us, New Romans, Buddhists, Moham-

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medans, Federals, and Harrimen had convalesced. He added, "I wonder what is brewing behind Harrimanna's curtain?"

That night, hours after the bigwigs had departed, I fell asleep with my mind full of them, and next morning I awoke still engrossed, but not thinking I would ever see Dr. Solengula again.

When the day's shift finished, the sun was shining in a clear sky; so I got out the station bus and took to the air . . . I was flying high enough to see a lot of Ireland; I was thinking how well the sun-lit forests looked, not at all like a graveyard, when the bus jumped convulsively.

One glance at the percussion screen was enough. I retracted the wings, turned on the anti-grav, and went straight up, quick. I was filled with the excitement of the unprecedented. Three miles up, I saw the incredible, the stern end of a Harriman highflier—about fifty yards of it; the open end blown almost inside out—like a shuttle-cock with ragged feathers.

The wounded thing fluttered with anti-crash intent. Illusion this, of course, but when I saw the lilac glow on the Callaghan panel, illusion became panic; I thought I must be deranged.

The panel was an unusual fitment, based on Callaghan's work on the radiation pattern of animal living tissue. The lilac glow indicated the living human: that's what seemed so impossible to me.

It wasn't though. A mile up, when the shuttle-cock was momentarily bottom-up, the stern window crashed, something jetted out, righted itself—it was a paracush,

and it had a rider. I put the scanner on him—it was a him; I got his face big on the screen. He was wearing a cockscomb cap with antenna, and when I shouted to him, his answering shout came through clearly.

He came up the zylo-rungs—half a mile of nothingness under him—as if they were stone steps. I looked at him. He was a cool one, just a boy, and his leg was scraped from knee to ankle. He said, "I thank you," in English, adding, as I stared, "What are your languages?" I replied, "English, Spanish, Chinese." He said, "You are a Federal?" I said, "Yes, what are you?" He said, "Great is Harrimanna the Hermaphrodite." I said, "Oh," to that, and got busy on his leg. "My name is Jackson Wong. What's yours?" "I'm K<sub>3</sub>B." I thought a moment. I asked, "You haven't any father or mother have you?" He said, "Harrimanna is my father and mother, but I know who my live father is, and he calls me Yanno."

When we got back to base, the boss sent over the station doctor, who put Yanno to bed. His leg wasn't dangerous. An hour later, the boss called me, and said a special doctor from H.Q. would arrive by highflier the next morning. Dazed, I repeated, "Special doctor," and the boss said, "You have done something big, picking that boy up. Intelligence want to see you. Use the lab. screen, and put your synchroniser to Z<sub>5</sub>."

Intelligence put me through it, three of them, for over an hour, going over every detail. They were very polite, and seemed pleased; but when they let me go, I was ready for bed.

Next evening, Dr. Solengula came on the screen: I



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got a kick out of that. I told him the boy wanted a private-beam conversation with his father, to ask if he could stay a while and then take me back with him. Dr. Elmer said that the father, very much a V.I.P., was already demanding his son's return, and that he didn't think the boy would stay long. He was right there, Master K3B was gone within a week.

That was long enough for me to find out that we were different as chalk is from cheese. For instance, my hand-woven leisure clothes shocked Yanno; and still more, the fact that handicrafts were practised for pleasure. He said, "We wouldn't allow that sort of private madness. A man isn't a savage to make things with his hands; he makes machines to make things for everybody, and he wears the clothes he is given."

He was astonished when I told him I had been to New Rome and had seen the Pope's summer palace in the Andes; he could not understand free travel.

But our family life really flabbergasted him. He said, "Animals have lairs and bring up their young; and that is what you do. Fathers and mothers can tell their children anything. That is all wrong. In my country the state tells the children everything, so that they are sure to grow up to be good citizens."

Yanno had his private-beam talk with his father. His request to stay didn't come off, but I was invited to go back with him.

I didn't want to, not then, anyway. I had just been given work on the classification of the infusoria by their ingestion periods, which had been found to begin at the

exact moment a planet crossed the meridian on which they floated. I told Yanno this, and he said, "How if my father asked your President of Council to let you come?" I said, no, no; that wouldn't do at all; he must wait two or three months at least.

But it turned out that I was to be busy in a different way. The day after Yanno left, the boss told me I was to leave the island, and I couldn't speak for surprise.

I was to go to Marapopo on the shore of Freshwater, the African inland sea. Dr. Solengula would be my director. The boss said that Freshwater was the right name now—it had taken them a hundred years to get all the salt out of it—and that a highflier would take me there. He didn't suppose I had ever been in one. I mumbled, "No," to that.

The arrival of the highflier was an event. When the siren went, and the forcefence—a red sheet of crinkling air twenty feet high—sprang up round the landing field, I could just hear the shouting from the overlooking hillside, and I could imagine the rush of sightseers.

I strained my eyes up, and saw a speck that grew. The highflier came slanting down on an immense arc. It didn't look man-made. It came in like an arrow of God, soundlessly, except for the rush of air through stern-vanes slowly opening to an enormous peacock's tail. I thought of the captain at his keyboard, a virtuoso controlling the antigrav-fields. The ship earthed as lightly as a falling leaf. I looked at the great herculite hull, coppery-gold, glossed like an egg-shell; and suddenly the airfield and its buildings seemed incredibly small.

## JACKSON WONG'S STORY

I had got a kick out of the highflier; I got a different one, but just as impressive, when I saw Dr. Solengula in the flesh again; perhaps I should say, in the bone, because for all his bigness he was spare-fleshed.

In spite of the close-drawn Harrimanna curtain, Dr. Elmer knew something about them, and was interested in their methods of psychic control—a Harriman, he said, could have his mind emptied, every image conscious or unconscious in it examined, and the whole lot poured back without the man knowing anything had been done. Most interesting of all, he told me that Harrimanna manifested every thirtieth year, and that the next time was in four months. How the manifestations were managed he did not know, but they must be something extraordinary, because they were regarded as the most important event in the life of a Harriman or Harriwoman. He said my visit would, like underwater work, need proper training. I was going into deep water. The sea-bottom was a strange world, but Harrimanna's land would be stranger.

My preparation was an all day, and even a night affair because my hours of sleep were regulated and periodically interrupted. I was fed on special foods, I was weighed every day, I was never fitter.

The training was mostly psychic. Apparatus was used only when I was being taught how to use interest to push out aversion. The apparatus invisibly lined the walls of a small room. One wall was a screen, which recorded in colour and movement the pattern of my personal radiation. This was also made audible by the use of the

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corresponding sound frequencies. The effect of repugnance, disgust or horror on the radiation pattern was strikingly apparent.

But what impressed me most was the space-free conversation. 'Our science is proud of its advance from the physical to the non-physical. Telepathy had, of course, been known for thousands of years as a sporadic and not consciously controllable mental phenomenon, but the medium of transmission, the non-physical continuum in which time and space coalesce, was our discovery.

My training began in what were called the peat-rooms, two insulated cubicles well below ground level. Dr. Solengula thought the Harrimen unlikely to have space-free conversation, because their psychic methods would prevent access to the continuum.

My second meeting with Yanno took place, like the first, a mile up. The sling came out twice, first for me, then for my baggage. When the air-lift had gone, Yanno said, grinning, "Off we go; zip up," and as soon as the flaps of the tub-seat had settled round me, he nodded to the attendant; I heard the hiss of the gas, drew two or three sweetish breaths, and was out. When I came to, the sun-shutters were down. I looked through the opposite window at the intolerable splendour of the starry sky, and thought of the poet of the English, Blake, who would have included the stars, seen through unilluminated space, among the portions of eternity too great for the eye of man.

When we came down from the airless to the aerial, from darkness into light, I saw far away, growing,

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advancing as if I stood still, the great city of Harrimanna the Hermaphrodite.

Yanno's boast was true enough that here was realised the ideals of each for all and all for each, and the happiness of the greatest number. But, later, after I had time to digest my perceptions, my admiration was mixed with alarm.

Kalinov, Director to the Board of Temperament Control, said he inspired happiness by suiting temperament to work. Dr. Changking, one of his endrocrinologists, described himself as a conductor of the glandular orchestra. He said the pineal was an intelligence regulator, and that unnecessary intelligence was bad for happiness.

At a maternity hospital for inseminated women, the woman doctor in charge of the vast nursery explained that the separation of mothers and babies after three months was necessary to avoid maternal fixations not conducive to happiness. What was tactile and visual in mother love was supplied by the nurses, but what was audible was done better by soft-speakers, which could coo and laugh more convincingly. She asked me if I had not been impressed by the physical perfection of the Harrimen.

I had, and I filled my mind with the thought of it, so that I might forget my aversion. Was it fancy that the doctor wanted to keep me talking? I strove against the fear that the scanners were on me, recording my pulse-beat and respirations, the electrical impulses of my thinking, and measuring my perspiration.

## JACKSON WONG'S STORY

That night I called Dr. Solengula for the first time. At midnight, I lay relaxed upon my bed, and, beginning with the feel of the bedclothes, shut every sense impression out of consciousness. When my mind was empty, I cast into the void the mental energy of the agreed signal, the last two syllables of his name—GU-LA. . . . At the third call, I was with him in his room in Marapopo, and we talked together. The next morning I awoke refreshed. I had regained my resilience, and felt ready for anything.

When the day of the Festival came, I was given a yellow glassite robe. The great hall accommodated a hundred thousand, all robed alike. The amphitheatre looked like the bottom of an immense oval dish, lined with coruscating fire. Individuality could not live in that: I was just part of the mass. The flood of heatless light reached to the highest tier, and the roof, beyond sight, gave to the surging music-waves an undertow of cavernous sound.

Sound and light abruptly ceased. The heavy blanket of silence was torn by the sudden "Ah" of a hundred thousand gasps. My eyes were held by the spinning cloud of luminous mist in the centre of the amphitheatre; I saw the thing put out tentacles, coagulate in a gigantic form, brilliantly visible, though I could not see my own hands.

The womb of darkness delivered three enormous shouts. "HARRIMANNA. HARRIMANNA. HARRIMANNA."

The giant raised his staff; a suffocating silence fell.

## JACKSON WONG'S STORY

Harrimanna's garments were of woven light; his flesh glowed. The he-she had the bosom of a woman, the hips of a man; his hair flowed to his shoulders.

Harrimanna moved in a slow dance, with a grace only to be called supernal. Gesture and speech united in the power of the word; the voice was music for delight.

I was entranced, incapable of thinking. I was roused by a flash of imagination; for a moment the face of fascination before me changed to Dr. Solengula's, and seemed to warn me. Startled, I began to think. I closed my eyes, and tried to understand the words, not just listen. Harrimanna was telling them that he was their father and mother. They were to cease from striving and rest in his will. The Earth was his, and he would give it to them, and to them only. His family was one, and the many must serve the one, and be served by it. Above all, in his paradise on earth, they were to have prosperity and happiness.

All this seemed ordinary only as long as I kept my eyes closed. Later, back in Marapopo, they did not think it ordinary. They—the doctors of all sorts—emptied me by cross-emaminations, and I was glad to be emptied, because not until then could I begin to escape from my Harrimanna obsession.

I was important myself—for a while, more than ever I thought possible—and I enjoyed being so. Had I not been the first Federal ever to see the Festival of Harrimanna the Hermaphrodite?

# *Voice From the Gallery*

CATHERINE BROWNLOW

NOBODY bothered when Eve Burton put her last shilling in the meter and her head in the gas oven. Eve herself had forgotten the date and had no more than a vague idea of the time. The clock had stopped anyway. It was a cheap alarm, and had been losing for years. Now it stood, vague and incompetent, between a badly burnt aluminium saucepan and a nut of margarine that had picked up a hair, a fragment of a No. 14 bus ticket, and a splinter from the plywood box that was acting as a dresser. The clock said fourteen minutes past twelve, but in actual fact it was just about the time the barmaid at the Wheatsheaf was putting on her lipstick and the programme was changing at the Gaumont.

It didn't matter, of course. The neighbours might get a nasty turn, but although Eve was twenty-six, fair-haired and pretty, even when she hadn't washed her face, there was no one who loved her enough to bother much if she was here one day and gone the next. Inconvenient, it might be. But in a few years' time those who had found it a nuisance would cease to remember the incident; so why worry?

Yes, why worry? Even the riverside slum in which



## VOICE FROM THE GALLERY

she lived passed into oblivion, though it outlasted her lifetime by more than four hundred years. In place of the rows and rows of mean little houses appeared the first of the new Bubbleblock skyscrapers, outmoded now, of course, but when they first went up they caused a sensation that echoed round the world. Nobody could believe in those days that a building of that height would be light enough for London mud to support.

It so happened that six or seven hundred years later a schoolgirl lay curled up in an easy chair, just about where that gas stove must have been. Her name might have been Er-ling, or something of that sort, but in actual fact, it was Thomasina. She was secretly hoping that just that afternoon her particular friend would not come to see her; but particular friends in the twenty-fifth century are exactly the same as they were in the nineteen hundreds, and in all the centuries back to the days of King Solomon; and pretty soon the door flew open.

"Hullo," said the friend, who might have been Britta, but in actual fact was called Rosalind, "coming Outer-Spacing?"

Thomasina shook her head. This was exactly what she didn't want to be asked.

"Oh, why not?" continued her friend indignantly. "You didn't come last week either. It's no fun for me if you're not there. I can't think what you got a season ticket for if you never use it."

Thomasina lowered her gaze, and a slight flush spread over her Mongolian features.

## VOICE FROM THE GALLERY

"The fact is, Linda, I'm bored with Outer Space. I've seen it before."

Rosalind raised an eyebrow. "There's more in Outer Space than can be seen in an afternoon's flight, you know," she said acidly.

"It doesn't get you anywhere."

"That depends where you want to be got."

"It's all so impersonal. Oh, I know it's fun for the first two or three times. But I hate dressing up in all those clothes. I'd much rather be where there is plenty of life, than find myself rushing through barren emptiness until I wonder if I'll ever see a human face again."

"That's your ancestry," observed Rosalind, with the clinical detachment of the modern girl. "I don't object to the feeling of getting away from everything, but when you consider my antecedents it isn't surprising. If your forbears had lived on the side of a fjord for hundreds of years and rarely seen a strange face, instead of toiling away as they did down in the Yang-tse valley, you'd probably feel like I do."

Thomasina smiled. "I don't believe in all this accounting for type. It's so overdone."

"It keeps the Social Research Department occupied, anyway. Are you going to work in that when you leave school, Tommy?"

"I hope so," answered Tomasina, her eyes brightening. "As a matter of fact, that's why I can't come Outer-Spacing. My uncle works in the SRD you know, and he has lent me a Temposcope."

## VOICE FROM THE GALLERY

"One of those things," said Rosalind blasély. "My father says he wouldn't have one in the house. He says they're the biggest time-wasters of the century."

"They're useful, though. What would the SRD do without them?"

"Pack up. No, they're all right for historical research, I grant you. But for entertainment they're a terrible washout."

"There's nothing artistic about real lives, I admit."

"And real conversations are unendurable."

"I heard that public showing of the Court at Versailles was worth seeing though."

"It was," replied Rosalind with a wry smile. "It isn't now, though. I was misguided enough to take Mother, and she just couldn't get home fast enough. She was swinging on the phone for hours, asking the Censors' Department if they didn't know their business. So they tightened up the Automatic Switch-Off until it only requires two people to look at each other for the screen to go blank. Most frustrating. You're not really going to waste a whole afternoon playing with your new toy, though?"

Thomasina flushed. "I'll have to give it back soon, and there is something I wanted to follow up." She smiled apologetically at Rosalind. "Look, I'll show it to you."

She got out the compact little machine and stood it on the table. Then both girls stretched the arm-chair until it was large enough for two, and squeezed into it.

## VOICE FROM THE GALLERY

"It's only a cheap model," said Thomasina, opening the screen. "It's got no range at all."

"Oh, can't you get China?" asked Rosalind, disappointed.

"Can't even get Paris. And it's frightfully limited for time too. Nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries, that's all. Anything later comes through with a horrible flicker, and earlier is just a blank."

"Oh, Tommy! Don't tell me I've got to watch some pre-Discovery nonsense! I can't stand that."

"Why not? People had to live then. You can't despise them for their ignorance just because they were born before the Great Discovery." She consulted some numbers on a paper and started to turn the knobs.

"Darling, I'm not despising anyone. It's just that pre-Discovery days depress me. It seems so awful to live one's life without knowing *why* one is living at all."

"That's why I find those old people so fascinating," put in Tommy quickly. "It's their enormous courage. Just think what would happen to us if we didn't know why we were here. Would you go on living if you didn't know why?" She didn't wait for an answer. "Look!" she continued. "That's her. That one with fair hair. I've been following up her story, and I simply *must* find out what happens."

"Good heavens, Tommy, what ideas you do get in your head!" In amazement Rosalind watched the girl in blue jeans and a striped sloppy-joe who had appeared on the screen. "Who is she, for goodness' sake? What's she doing?"

"That's called spot-welding. I looked it up. She's putting those metal bands on to things for lamps."

"Interesting, really. It's just that blind look about all the people who lived then that I can't stand. What's her name?"

"Eve Johnson there. Later on she's Eve Burton, poor girl. But she's nice, isn't she? I wish I could talk to her. I've watched her so often now, I feel she's my friend."

"Doesn't she ever wash her face?"

"She will for her wedding. You'll see it later. Look at her as a little girl." Tommy turned the time-knob back seven years, tuned in again, and a child appeared in bare legs and enormous boots, a ragged skirt and a blouse that was pinned across her chest with a vast safety-pin. She was playing in the mud at the river's edge.

"Poor little brat," said Rosalind when they saw the child go in for her midday meal.

"Yes, her mother's no good. That's all she's getting to eat."

"And that she had to filch for herself."

"It's worse later." Tommy turned the time-knob on. "Oh, bother, I've gone too far! You've missed the wedding. Never mind; look at this. That's what she's sold her soul for. Odd, isn't it? That's Roger Burton."

"There's a charmer. Whatever does she want him for?" Rosalind stared as they watched the wide boy flirting with the handsome barmaid at the Wheatsheaf.

"Can't think. But she had a terrible chase to get

him." The screen went blank as the Automatic Switch-Off came into operation, and Thomasina turned the knobs again.

"Ah, look, this is where I got to last time. She's back from the factory and looking for the money she hid on pay-day."

"I suppose that character we saw back in the pub is handing it over to the barmaid."

"No, as a matter of fact, he's not. Her son beat his dad to it this week."

"How many children?"

"Only one. But that's too many. I'll show you what he's up to now." After several attempts the Gaumont Cinema came into focus and a nine-year-old boy was picked out in the stalls. He was unwashed and unbrushed, not unnaturally, and his *retroussé* nose gave his face a look of discontented determination. His feet were propped up on the seat in front of him, and he was licking a lollipop.

"I'm not at all convinced I'd say thank you for that one," murmured Rosalind, studying the boy pensively. "When you think that child was born only five and a half centuries ago, I almost agree with all those old stick-in-the-muds who tell us the Great Discovery was made before the world was ready for it."

"Eve's different, though, isn't she? She'd have got on all right with it, don't you think?"

"Considering you and I manage to exist side by side with the Great Discovery and all its implications, I see no reason why she shouldn't too. But it's awful bad

luck on her going through all that and never knowing what it's all about."

"Yes, isn't it *awful*? I wish I could tell her." Thomasina sounded almost tearful.

"What happens to that beastly little boy?"

"I don't know. I didn't follow him up yet. He's always pinching something, and sometimes he gets caught. A little while ago he was in a police station. I just watched because Eve was there with him. But I don't know what it was all about. It's difficult with a silent machine."

"You should have got your uncle to lend you one with sound while he was about it."

"That wouldn't have made any difference. They're frightfully difficult to understand, those twentieth-century people, even if you speak the language. We listened to a Labour Conference at school, and I only understood about one word in ten."

"How did you find Eve's name?"

"I read it on her marriage lines."

"Is she fond of that brat of hers?"

"He's everything in life to her. Oh, look what's happened now! That's some kind of a court, isn't it? He's properly in trouble this time. Oh, but poor Eve! See how upset she is."

"What a pity she doesn't know. I do think it was unfair that those people had to go on suffering like that without any idea of why. I suppose I've been born into the post-Discovery world because I couldn't have endured it beforehand."

A hooter sounded outside the block.

"That's for the Outer-Spacers. Do change your mind and come, Tommy." But Thomasina shook her head.

"She'd haunt me if I didn't find out about her. You don't realise, Linda, I've got so fond of her now."

"Well, let me know what happens. If I don't rush and change now, I'll miss this trip."

When Rosalind had gone Thomasina turned her attention to the screen. The magistrate was addressing Eve, but Eve was in tears, and Thomasina suddenly realised that the boy was being taken away from her.

"Don't cry, Eve," murmured Tommy, distressed. She twisted a knob to hurry along the action, and presently saw Eve stumbling blindly back through the streets to the house she called home, wondering how life could be endured without the only human being she had ever truly loved. Her son was to be brought up by other people, until he was eighteen. Thomasina could not tell the details, but she felt Eve's distress in every fibre of her being. And she knew that when Eve felt in her new hiding place for the money she had put away, it would be empty, for her husband had already discovered it that morning.

For a long while Eve sat on the bed and stared into space. It didn't matter, now that the boy was gone, if there was less money for food. She had wanted it to buy him a present. But there was nothing she could send him now by which to remember her. She took a shilling from her bag, crossed the narrow passage to the kitchen,



dropped the coin into the meter and opened the oven door.

"Oh, Eve, no, no, don't do it!" cried Thomasina aloud. "Oh, how unfair it is that you can't understand, and I can't tell you! But I promise you, Eve, I *promise* you there's nothing to regret. When the end of all things is known, you won't sorrow over what's happened."

Thomasina was crying now. She could hardly watch the screen. But the echo of a voice over the centuries seemed to strike a chord in Eve's heart. Without knowing why she did so, she struggled blindly to her feet, turned off the gas and lurched back to the bedroom again. Vague clichés of comfort floated through her brain, but she wanted to remember that especial message that had come into her mind. It was as though she had heard a voice, but what did it say? Maybe she'd remember later, to-morrow, perhaps. Just now she was too exhausted. She fell back on the bed and sank into a deep sleep.

# *Walkabout*

STEPHEN EARL

THERE stands, in the middle of the square, a thin man about thirty years old. He is neatly and somewhat gaily dressed, as he was brought up to be. His hair is short, straight and fair, his face lively. A woman, wearing a plain green dress, comes out of the crowd and says hello to him.

"Oh, hello, Mary." He notices the dress. "My felicitations." She answers that it's not for a long time, she is tired of the dress already, and the whole thing is a bore. She adds, "A girl."

"Oh. Well, she'll come into an attractive world, I suppose. Still——"

"Oh, there now. I don't like this dress but that's my fault. I must say, blue tower is divinely beautiful, isn't it. Is it where you work?"

"Definitely. But you see, I been there years now. I've realised Johnstein's predictions too often. He's fixed the earth's crust. It's five equations and a note;—of course, that's beautiful really. Then, there's all this business. It's perfect. I looked up the plans. You seen them?"

## WALKABOUT

"Sort of."

"There's something too. The society arranged, you give 'em the material, apparatus. Then just sit on your big, soft behind, to calculate all the consequences. There aren't any mistakes there. There weren't any orders, even. Nothing direct, no plans, and it all works itself out correctly."

They walk into the lemon pavilion set diagonally on the square, and start to eat in an empty corner. He says, "There was too much wisdom then."

"No, you just don't like it. But it's right, and I've never been so sure of it."

"I'm in the plan too, and that's silly. It's this way. I don't care for all this. Then, they say, I go walkabout in the Andes, or sailing; break my neck, doesn't matter, it's all in the plan. Hmph. It's a contradiction."

The woman gets up, and says, "Then you're not sensible. You're not even on our side."

"Let me see. I'm for you and against that dress. I hope it's a boy, too. That'll do, won't it?"

"It's still not sensible. All this whole thing hangs together."

"That's the trouble. There's no getting out from it."

The woman goes away, making a little gesture with one hand. The man eats with some relish, but gets up soon and walks quickly out. He crosses the square, goes under the street, and up the shady passage to his tower. In the office he calls his help. This is an uncheerful man, dark, with a shallow, lined face. There's no mystery to him; but his life must be private.

## WALKABOUT

"Hey, John. I'm going away."

"I see. Do you need to investigate something or just——"

"Oh, I'm just going you know."

"Then you won't want too much maps and stuff."

"I don't know about that."

"If it's just getting out——"

"I can't say. I shall tell you what I want later."

He goes through the velvet curtain to his room. The low murmur from the office is shut out from here. He speaks into an open red box.

"Dorothy." There is a pause.

"Darling."

"You said I was your favourite."

"Sort of."

"How much?"

"Dearest! I can't possibly——"

"But would it be all right if——?"

"No. I don't think—— Sweetheart, even if it wasn't for anything else, I don't think we *could* fix it for——"

"Not that. No, not yet anyhow. I don't know why. But I want to go away a while."

"Oh." There is a long pause. "Yes, darling, that's all right. Walkabout?"

"That kind of thing. I don't know. It must be. But not exactly. Can I have you to-night, maybe?"

"Oh, yes."

"No one——?"

"Shut up!"

"Yes, then."

## WALKABOUT

Next morning, it seems different, and the houses look gay and comfortable in the dawn. He walks slowly down the long flat lawn at the back of the tower. The rocket on one side casts an enormous shadow.

He whizzes straight up in the little lift to his room, and looks at the seismic record of the night. There are marginal irregularities from North India, they can be tidal, or an effect of high wind and rainfall; Johnstein is indecisive. He writes an analysis; posts it down to the main calculator, and goes off to have a cup of maté. In the drinking-room lies the director, sprawled on a couch.

"Morning, Anton."

"Morning. I think I just done something."

"Good. You're going away."

"Oh. Yes, I think I need to. Just a bit, you know."

The director gets up.

"Make a good time of it, then."

He gives a friendly wave, and walks away softly. Anton goes back to his room at once. He gazes across the square at the theatre; it looks like a beehive, closer, in the crystalline air, and smaller than it is. He studies the slip from the calculator. Greatest correlation is with the tides; there is nothing proved. It soon will be, for the system never fails. He scribbles a note for his replacer, and calls John.

"You can get me a drifter."

"All right."

He is going to South-East Andes, the most completely known International Park, but wants everything an ex-

## WALKABOUT

pedition would take. He will get Dr. Vesius, at the top of the tower, to teach him the necessary languages that afternoon.

"I'll go this evening."

"Very adventurous, Is there anything else?"

"No. But I'm not trying to be adventurous."

That evening, he rises softly in the air, and points the heavy nose of the drifter above and to the left of the sun. Without looking round, he accelerates, and sits back. As the drifter levels out, the sun starts to rise slowly, like a bubble in a pool of light. It loops over his head, and he drops down, flashing over the green Brazilian shore, and brakes a little. The shadows on the panel cease moving, and he comes to rest over a dusty grey plateau. There are two stunted trees a mile to his right; he glides over and gets out in their shade. A large, ugly bird in the tree hisses at him, and flaps away.

There is a subdued buzzing by the insects. He eats a meal, and throws the wrapping into the bristly grey shrubs around the tree, where the glinting cellulose is soon covered by ants. He sprays himself with insect repellent, dons a broad-brimmed resin and silverfoil hat, and goes into the sunlight, looking closely at the ground. He stops, to examine a pebble, or watch the tactics of a spider or lizard hunting.

Like this, he spends the afternoon and early evening, moving on and stopping, not stopping for long. Just once, he is taken by the weird pattern and satiny sheen on the wings of a big hairy butterfly. He sits on a rock to gaze at it. Soon it flies away, beating its wings with

surprising force, going fast and rather high over the plain. Anton says, "Damn!" and goes back to the drifter. After supper, he turns on some music; there is such a noise of frogs and insects now that he can only hear the loud parts, so he switches it off. "Now," he says to himself, "if I were real sensible, no doubt I'd listen to the frogs instead." He plots a slow course to the high Andes for to-morrow morning, shuts the drifter down, and goes to sleep in the rear compartment.

He awakes suddenly at eight next morning, dresses very carefully, and has breakfast straight away.

Pushing up the door, he jumps down. There is a naked dark-brown man squatting in the shade of the tree-trunk. This man gives Anton a charming and friendly smile; gets up, and shakes both his hands vigorously for a long time. Ten or eleven others standing about come over, one by one, and greet him in the same way. It is intensely hot; Anton sits down in the shade of the drifter, and wipes his face.

"Are you Chibé people?"

"We are Chibé. My father is of the council of the Chibé." The man who was squatting answers him.

"I am glad to see your faces."

"We are very glad to see your face. To-day we are feasting. We will be glad if you feast with us."

"I am your friend. Certainly, I will feast with you."

He climbs into the drifter, and rises into the air. The Chibé watch intently, turn suddenly, and start into the plain behind, beckoning him to follow. They trot in a loose bunch, raising their knees high, Anton glides

behind. A hidden dip in the plateau curves away to the right. It becomes a valley; there are greenish bushes along its floor. The slope gets steeper, and suddenly a ravine opens in front; Anton can see dark blue-green through it, and the gleam of a river. The Indians skip nimbly down the dirty yellow scree falling into the ravine. At the bottom there are great trees, and under these a winding path laid with reed stalks leads them further down, through the undergrowth.

Finally, they enter a clearing. A long hut stands at the left of it, twenty feet high, made of reeds. A few little huts stand back under the trees. Above the trees show the walls of a canyon, the sunlight slanting down one side, and in the middle of the clearing a tapir is being roasted over a slow fire. The councillor's son shouts, and some women come out of the forest on either side, carrying pots of liquid and tools. Then twenty or thirty men and some children emerge from the long hut. Anton stops the drifter and gets out. He is surrounded by the Chibé, laughing and shaking his hands; they lead him over to a small man, with deep lines on his face, who is the councillor.

"You are welcome. As you see, there are few of us here. The Chibé are all following different men now. These people follow me. Come and sit with me, and we will feast."

"Good. Do you always feast now?"

"No. This is the first time for many years."

The feast lasts long, though not much food is handed round. The councillor says little; he answers Anton's



questions, and comments acidly on the eating manners of the younger men. The Chibé refrain from looking at Anton, as cats do sometimes, when they meet.

The councillor gets up, he must talk with some of the men. He calls a girl over to him.

"Get the flying man what he wants; I must go now."

The girl squats near Anton, not looking at him, and saying nothing. He asks her how old she is.

"That man is older than me, but not much."

She answers his other questions shortly: she is not married; she may be soon; she does not know which man; what she likes doing most is eating. Anton falls silent; he looks at her, and then at the crowd. Occasionally, one of the older men takes some tapir meat. The others watch these, and smile behind their hands. The meat is almost gone, and there is little talk. Anton says, suddenly, to the girl:

"I want some meat, quite a big piece." The girl looks at him for a moment, then goes over and gets some.

"You can take this, when no one is looking." The girl looks blankly at him.

"It's for you. I don't want it." The girl smiles, and sits down again, with her back to him. Anton feels acutely sad—he can't say why.

A young man hands round crude wooden mugs, and a fat woman follows him, filling them with a sticky fluid. When the mugs are all filled, they give a great shout, and raise them to their lips. Anton drains his mug; he feels a bitter taste, filling his throat and nose. The heads of the Chibé seem to him to swell, and rise from their

bodies. He sees them grin enormously and, as they throw their mugs, still full, into the fire, he hears a faint peal of laughter. The world seems to be yellow, and he falls to the ground sideways; he cannot balance.

His arms and legs are heavy as iron. His fingers fall of their own weight, outstretched and helpless. The councillor comes over to him smiling, and squats by his side. He unbuttons Anton's jacket clumsily, and takes away the two guns, not hurrying at all. Then he sits down, cross-legged, by Anton's side, looking at him.

Anton hopes ardently they are going to kill him. He feels in advance what it would be like. The canyon walls stretch a hundred or a thousand miles above him, yellowish black, and the walls open and close very slowly. He wants to sink farther into the ground; it seems strange that he can't, he feels so heavy. Different thoughts and impressions crowd into his head, and each one separate from the others.

Instantly, without having moved, the Chibé are all around him; the councillor is standing over him. He kicks out desperately, but his legs are excessively weak. They grab his wrists, jerk him to his feet; he struggles feebly for a few minutes and finally just hangs in their hands, staring at them. He is dragged through the crowd by six or seven young men; his legs move, but floppily and out of time. For a moment he sees the face of the girl; she pushes something into his pocket. She too is smiling. The crowd thins out, he is being pulled along a dark path by the young men alone.

Gradually, his legs begin to work again, but he is too

weak to walk at the pace he is being dragged. They cross a shallow stream, and go up a short slope on the other side; bulging slabs of granite show through the trees. Two of the men grasp his ankles, and one puts his hand over and grips his mouth. They carry him softly to the rock face, and move a bit to the right. There is a vertical slit in the rock there; they creep up to it cautiously, swing him back, and throw him headlong into the cave. He can scarcely break his fall.

The cave stinks of carrion. Anton lies on his face, and hears something snort in the darkness. He wants to wait, and be killed, but the sensation in his back is unbearable. He gets up on his knees, and a knife falls to the ground. There is an appalling roar, and a beast rushes at him in the dark. Anton picks up the knife and points it at the beast, waveringly. He throws himself, or falls forward, his hands outstretched, screaming; he is immediately smashed over. For a few moments it knocks him about helplessly on his back, his shoulder is gripped and crushed; then everything is still.

He crawls slowly from under the great weight of the beast and, gripping the walls of the cave, pulls himself upright. He looks down, and sees it was a jaguar, rumoured extinct. The knife had ripped its throat open. Hanging his crippled arm in his jacket, he walks very slowly, but quite steadily out of the cave, and back to the camp. It takes him about two hours to do so.

He sits on a log by the ashes, dripping blood. The Chibé come slowly and very quietly out of the hut, and stand before him. He gets up, and looks at them steadily.

## WALKABOUT

"Your tiger is dead," he says, "how will you get along now?"

They give no answer.

"What will you do? Will you get another tiger?"

The Chibé look around, at the forest and each other. They still do not speak.

"You cannot do it. There are no more. You must live without tigers now."

The councillor says, "I do not think we want to."

"Oh, there are other things beside tigers. You can build some more houses and increase your people. You can learn to be wise now."

"Then you can teach us to be wise."

"No I can't. You must do it by yourselves. It will take you a long time probably."

He walks over to the drifter, gets in, and leaves them looking up at him. His wounds, and the pain in his shoulder, bother him considerably, but he knows he can hang on till he gets there. Then, of course, they will look after him as long as he needs it. It occurs to him, vaguely, that there may be some more to be done at home; perhaps there always will be. He settles back as comfortably as he can for a slow trip home. He steers with his left hand, his eyes half-closed. 'Besides,' he thinks, 'the Chibé are a poor people; they will get on somewhat too.'

# *The Shadow-play*

E. D. FITZPATRICK

WHEN she saw him step on to the first floor the old lady knew he had not changed his mind.

At least, she thought, he had the civility to come alone: his manners had surely improved since their last talk, on which unpleasant occasion he had brought a corps of sniggering aides with him, and had stormed and shouted at her in front of them.

Now he came quietly, a black, long-armed figure against the green of the late-day sea, his hair and his robe moving gently like the trailing plants that swayed from the cliff behind him. He could not see her, of that she was sure, but was following the galleries, the route of pictures; making his way, with hand outstretched against the cavern wall by the paintings he would have destroyed long since, were it not for the community support he would have destroyed with them.

As she dozed by the fire, half-watching his approach, her tired mind wondered why he had bothered to come back. He had talked so much of the work and the progress, of the plans for the journey and of how they were all to travel; had boasted, in fact, how skilfully

things were organised under his command now that her brother were dead, that it seemed odd he should persist in his efforts to make her join them. There must be more people than he dared admit who were half-hearted about the venture. It must be more important than she knew to give her support to the scheme, to show confidence in the new leader who was, after all, just a fisherman's son. A leader who, manly figure and splendid orator though he was, had none of the traditions of comfort and security that had blessed her brother's term of office. No background, thought the old lady, and a sketchy upbringing.

Suddenly she saw him standing right in front of her, tall, aggressive, his face a-blotch with the shifting shadows from the corner fire. "Madam," he said, "we are all ready." And she noticed with irritation that his voice had a commanding resonance, a certain quality that reminded her of the undertow out beyond the spit, a deep, compelling strength that could take men out beyond their depth. And drown them, she thought.

Her drowsiness had gone and she sat up against the leather cushions; a flutter of excitement came unbidden into her throat, yet she managed to answer him coldly, "So you are ready. Then surely there is no reason for further delay."

"I beg you to reconsider. We are leaving with the first light and I cannot let you stay here; we are not a community without you."

"Of course you are not a community without me," she countered, "nor will be. For there are those who think

as I do, that this is the most scatterbrained of all your plans and who will, when the journey is about to start or even some thousand metres done, find reason to come home and stay with me. I have told you all this so often."

"You may take whatever precedence or position you wish," he said, "only come with us. There is scant future for any of us here, and none for you alone. The galleries are damp and the sea draws nearer every month. In the New City they are already at work on a fine cathedral; I plan great tiered houses, high and dry above the ground. . . ."

"You talk of cities, you talk of plans, but all you do is drift from place to place. . . ."

"Reconnaissance has been essential. I . . ."

"Do you not know!" she cried, and her voice sounded rasping and weary. "A score of cities have risen and a score crumbled to the valley-mud where you plan yet another: all this shoddy surface building, lasting such a little while. The country is a mass of such ruins, monuments to the foolish. But what can one expect you to know of such things. A childhood spent bringing wood to the store and tending cattle is no fit preparation for . . ."

"My father taught me much of value and . . ."

"I knew your father when he was no taller than a forest pony, hunting in the rock-pools for crabs. He had no vast knowledge of the world."

"My father believed in progress. He taught me that progress . . ."

"Progress! Is that why he went away, camping by

## THE SHADOW-PLAY

this same slow river that seems to own your heart. Drift, drift, drift, forever searching for something new. Is that progress?"

"You say," he said quietly, "that I spent my childhood as a cowherd. That is partly true. But I spent it also working for the artists in the galleries. You do not know what the galleries were like for a poor boy. If you could only imagine how I hated them and everything they stood for: the squalor of the darkening fires that set the eyes; the stench of mutton-fat. Oh, and those dreary colours, and the facile themes of the traditional artists. Men with wings. Men with globes upon their heads, or balanced, Libra-fashion, either hand. As though it mattered that men once flew! Or that they have seen other worlds than this! But the painters all looked back, they all looked to the past . . ."

"An artist can only look to the past," she said. She sounded kinder now, as though she realised for the first time that his life had not been as pleasant as her own.

"I, too, am an artist," he said, "but I can look to the future. I do not daub the galleries with mutton-fat and the woodsmoke from a Meon log. I keep my plans within my head until I can build them in all the dimensions. I shall keep my community upon the surface of the earth where the air is sweet and smoke soon blows away. Where the children will grow straight and healthy and not bend and gnarl like a poor apple before they reach the middle years. My pictures will be of the future and all will enjoy them."

"Success has come to you too early," said the old lady



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shortly, "you are remarkably pompous. It will be interesting to hear what becomes of you."

He stood up very straight above her; in the red of the fireglow his face looked veined and knotted in anger and for a moment she thought he was going to strike her.

"It is unlikely that you will hear what becomes of me," he said, "unlikely, too, that I shall ever know *your* fate." Whether it was a habit of deference or whether he were ~~paying~~ her his last respects she could not tell, but he backed away seven paces before turning and walking swiftly towards the star-bright circle of the sea-door.

She suddenly felt unspeakably tired, desperately lonely. She was a frail old lady, alone and forsaken. No one had the kindness to agree with her; nobody had the courage to stay and look after her. They were, all of them, under the spell of an uneducated vagrant who had the conceit to believe that men could live where (it had been proven time and time again) they could not. A man who despised the glorious galleries and believed only in action.

The one thing, she thought, that could be considered in his favour was that he had had the grace to stay his hand until after her brother's death at the great age of fifty-three. Only then had he rallied the caverns, held meetings on the scented downs near the chimneys, won them all over by his energy and enthusiasm, by his ceaseless talk of a better life for all. What he had really meant, she thought, was a better life for himself as their leader.

She pulled the robes closely about her and lay back against the soft leather. She was warm and comfortable.

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All about her were the pleasant things and the treasure she knew so well. The huge stack of logs; the skins and robes; the jet-engine within its protective glass-casing; the Bank of England notes, also glass-encased which dated from that fragile era before the broad-nosed men came to the country; (a brief enough visit, for the damp went into their flat-boned faces and drove them away in pain.) Works of art which had survived since the time when all animals who hoped to live had gone underground until the vibrations and the dust settled into silence.

Alone with her treasures and her thoughts, she watched the last light go from the sky and the phosphorescence start to shiver on the sea, while all down the galleries the pictures seemed to move amongst the shadows. It is a beautiful place, she thought, in which to have lived, in which to die; but they will be lonely last days without the bustle and the gossip of the caverns. And I shall miss the dogs.

He would be back with the party by now, telling them, with his own uncanny twist of speech, what she had said; making her words tangential, hitting different meanings from the ones she had meant, yet using, undeniably, the words she had used. His hold over the people was too new a thing to withstand many setbacks, he would not allow her to become martyred.

As she drifted into tentative sleep she fancied herself with them, carried shoulder-high into the New City, and borne down a long gallery between fine houses, tiered high and dry above the ground. Then the husky

## THE SHADOW-PLAY

voice of the sea caught at the fragments of her senses and talked her into sleep. So that she did not hear the call on the downs above her head.

The moon went down and the stars crusted the cold sky. The sea grew milky-white and as the fire plumed and died against the hard logs the shadows stilled upon the pictures, the moving mist shrouded the glass cases.

The voices began to call through the caverns at dawn. Small, clear voices that came from the chimneys and the rock pools, voices that jumped like pebbles up the galleries. Young, eager voices, calling, beseeching, sounding. The old lady stirred and felt the cramping cold and put out her hand toward the red ashes of the fire.

"Kristina! Kristina! We've come! We're here!" and again, "Kristina!"

'No,' thought the front of her mind, 'it could not be so.' She must be dying, to imagine she could hear the voice of one so beloved, as a drowning fisherman will see a boat behind the crest of a wave, as a parched man will hear running water. The voices faded, as though they had gone towards the Old Workings. She shuddered violently and sat up, peering at the great skirt of mist that came coiling towards her. It had been a vivid dream indeed, for it was Miles' voice she had heard. 'I have been a fool,' she thought, 'to stay here. A proud and thoughtless old woman.' Once again the mist seemed to falter and come running up to meet her.

"Kristina!"

"Miles!" she cried. "It is you! Oh, my dear boy."

He hugged her affectionately. "It's wonderful to have found you at last," he said. "I'd forgotten what a rabbit warren this place is."

"I thought I was dreaming," said the old lady.

"This is a beautiful home." A dark girl moved out of the shadows and curtsied before the old lady, who held out her hand. "It's very good of you to come, child," she said.

"There is no time to lose," said Miles. "Tell me what you want to bring with you and what things you want brought on later."

"Bring with me?" I do not understand," said his aunt, but already her mind had given a little leap of hope as though across a dreadful rift of despair.

"You are coming with us now," said the young man, "we are going to carry you through the caves. No argument, please, no objections admitted," but he smiled. Oh, what a difference from the other one!

"I do not wish to leave," she said, but her voice carried no conviction. "The pictures," she added.

"My dear aunt," he said, "give me credit for some imagination. Every movable thing that you wish to be brought to New London will be brought. As for the paintings, I plan to copy every one, the whole and the detail, down to each last smoky shade and colour. I love them so well I carry the designs in my head. There is a wonderful new medium. Little squares of coloured stone, placed upon the surface of the floor: I shall copy the pictures so that they will be in the floors of the city

buildings for ever. I shall write your name beside them in the same stones. None of our history will be lost."

"You are a good boy," said his aunt, "and a credit to the family." She turned to the girl, "You need never worry about your future," she said, "with a man who respects the past."

He was putting the robes together. "We will make a sort of litter for you," he said, "and carry you in comfort."

"O dear!" she said, suddenly weary, "I haven't sorted anything. I was so determined not to leave. He came here, Miles. He was *brutal*." Tears sprung to the old lady's eyes.

"He is not a tolerant man," said her nephew, "not a likeable man, either. But what energy! What vision! What a leader! I would follow . . ."

"There are so many treasures," said the old lady, "I hardly know . . ."

Miles looked at her keenly. "We will bring everything," he said firmly, "everything. We must get you to the surface now, and hurry to join the main party. Then I will come back with a couple of aides and bring every single thing."

Now that there was no need for struggle the old lady felt her self-control slacken. Rather like being a child again, she thought, with other people to make the decisions, carry the weight. She felt her mind and body relax and go, as it were, partly to sleep.

The girl moved gracefully, yet with purpose, and she and Miles made a stretcher of ash-poles and robes, pillowed it with leather cushions, and placed the old

## THE SHADOW-PLAY

lady carefully upon it. Miles dreaded the moment of leaving the floor, in case at the last minute his aunt offered further reason for delay, but to his relief she appeared to be sleeping.

He kissed the girl quickly. "It was wonderful of you to come here with me," he said, "it's made my aunt so happy. She might never have agreed to leave the caverns if she had not seen you."

"Nonsense," said the girl, but her eyes shone with pleasure.

They made their way down on to the first floor, across the stepping-stones and along the galleries to the sea-door. The stretcher was surprisingly light. As they climbed the rocky steps to the surface the old lady stirred.

"Drowned," she murmured, "taken out and drowned."

"What did you say?" asked Miles gently, but she did not seem to hear.

The morning air struck like spray against their faces and the morning light was oddly yellow, a cruel light that showed too clearly things not seen in the caves.

"Open your eyes," said the girl, "and see how the sun shines through the mist. Is it not beautiful?" Then she looked again at the face below her and drew the robe sadly across it.

# *Venus and the Rabbit*

E. M. FITZPATRICK

THE rabbit drummed angrily with its hind legs as the little man came towards it. Since the great death 250 years before, rabbits had become the rulers of the animal world; but the little man thrust out a hand with stiff, mechanical precision, and a stiff, mechanical smile arranged itself as if operated by external means. The rabbit knocked him down.

It was just about to kick its victim when it found itself transfixed while the little man got up; he was not as tall as the rabbit which was five feet high when it stood upright.

"You are wondering who I am," said the little man; "I can feel it here," and he stroked his eyebrows. There was no audible sound as he conveyed these thoughts, but a tiny wisp of vapour trailed from his ears. Traces of the rabbit's long-vanished ability to be mesmerised still lingered; simple thoughts passed through its mind, mainly about food and other rabbits.

"I'm from the planet Venus as you call it," went on the little man. "I expect you thought I was from Mars—have any of them been here yet?"

The rabbit sensed anxiety and that something was expected of it; this little man must be lost, and across its primitive rabbit-mind lumbered the idea that mankind would want other mankind. Whatever had held it to the ground like the legendary snares was relaxed, so it made a tentative hitch-hiking gesture with a paw and set off down the hill with the little man skimming behind, still persevering in his attempts at communication.

“You don’t look at all like what we expected, although we have studied you and your ways for a long time. We knew of your wars and the death-illness after them. We had planned an invasion—of course we had made expeditions before—but we wanted to be sure we could establish contact again. The ether was affected you know. Not that radioactivity affects us; we’re immune.”

The rabbit ambled on, understanding nothing; it had begun to think of another rabbit.

“They’re a barbarous people on Mars, and they want to expand. That’s what threatens universal peace. They talk about co-existence, but when we tried to come to an agreement they were most unreasonable. That’s why we are interested in your atomic explosions—they’re not immune, you know. If they had been, they would have been here long ago.” He realised he was making no impression and, at the same moment, caught sight of a train making its way along the valley.

‘Lucky’, implied the rabbit-mind, connecting humans with trains, and the little man understood the train was



meant for him. In fact, it was not. Many years before, large atomic piles had been set up to run transport and industry and the mechanical brains that controlled them, and were not yet exhausted, although they were getting so low that aeroplanes were no longer capable of becoming airborne but taxied about like sleepy wasps at the end of summer, and the trains were gradually running down like clockwork toys on a thick pile carpet. This particular train moved downhill quite briskly, stopped neatly opposite the platform, and set off again with the little man inside it. It meandered through pleasant countryside, already reverting to scrub and marsh; buildings were in ruins and the fields tangled with weeds. There were a few wild animals and some birds, and more giant rabbits; presently a town came in sight and the train stopped so long that the little man got out, and satisfied the robot ticket collector with a piece broken off a plastic poster of Hastings. The robot was not so selective as it had once been, due to rust, otherwise nothing but cardboard would have induced it to raise the barrier; its mechanical arm clanked up and down as it had for centuries; insatiable for tickets it gave a metallic belch as this stray crumb went down its gullet.

The human who stood outside was not transfixed by any strange force; astonishment alone was enough. He had been meeting trains for a decade, and now here was this tiny creature, without doubt of the human species, but odd.

Once more the little hand shot out and the smile

arranged itself again. This time it was a success; the human being's face lit up, smiled back, and hand clasped hand. The Venus man transmitted his thoughts while the human being, whose name was Ralph, spoke aloud. It was only later that Ralph realised that it was 'rum' so that he was puzzled as to what sort of language they had used.

"We'd almost given up hope of anyone turning up after all this time," said Ralph.

"I'm from Venus," said the little man. "We thought of populating your sphere."

Ralph was too taken aback by the first statement to grasp the second. "Good heavens!" he remarked, aptly enough. "Venus! I say, come along and meet the others. Venus. I can't believe it."

"You expected them from Mars then?" asked the Venusian. "I asked someone I met when I first landed but he did not know."

"Someone you met? When? Where? Which station did you get in at?"

This plainly puzzled the little man, so Ralph said politely, "I'm afraid our time-tables are terribly out of date. You see there are no printers and not much paper, but of course no one travels now. This man you talked to—what was he like?"

"Something like you, now that I look carefully. Longer ears but the same teeth and face. More fur though; all over."

"Good heavens, old boy, that wasn't a man, that was a giant rabbit you tried to talk to. Absolute menace;

they're getting bigger and bigger. Knock you down for two pins. I say, have you a name or anything?"

The little man conveyed it, but Ralph couldn't understand. "Could you say it, please?" he asked.

The little man obliged with a sound rather like a kitten purring.

"Sounds like one of those Polish names," said Ralph. "Will Purr do?" And Purr it had to be for they had arrived at a house, and Purr was taken into a room where an older man, a woman and a girl sat round a tea-table. "This is Mr. Purr," said Ralph. "He comes from Venus. My father and mother and my sister."

"I expect you'd like some tea after your journey," said Ralph's mother. "Milk and sugar, Mr. . . . er . . . Venus did you say?" She stopped as if an abyss had opened before her, recovered her balance and went on, "We've seen no new faces for so long we'd almost given up hope."

"The four-ten," said Ralph's father. "Never a good train."

"I must ask you at once," said Purr, "are you free from disease? You see we are not immune yet from all your diseases and I cannot risk contracting one until there are more of us."

"I think you can rest assured," said the old man, "that we are a very healthy family—quite remarkably healthy."

Purr seemed to inhale his tea; it disappeared without the cup ever quite reaching his mouth. The girl watched him, but so far had not spoken.

"We saw great explosions from your earth," said Purr; "they even caused cosmic disturbances for a time, and we know that great sickness followed."

"It was terrible," said Ralph's mother. "They died like flies. We try never to think of it." She picked up her cup and managed to swallow her emotion with her tea.

"But the Martian situation is getting worse and at last we decided to take the risk."

"How kind of you," said Ralph's mother bleakly. "More tea?" Purr seemed able to dispose of a great deal of tea, for he had not realised it was not some perpetual refuelling necessary to human life.

"I would like to learn more about your wars," he said. "Even if both sides were destroyed we shall manage better, and then perhaps only one side destroyed. Strength is necessary with the Martians; we tried appeasement, but where does it end? Too many conferences. What did you fight about?"

"Communism, old boy," said Ralph. "Russians getting too big for their boots."

"Never ought to have given up India," said Ralph's father. "That was the beginning. Greatest mistake."

"Communists," said Purr. "And did they want to kill you?"

"They kept saying not," said Ralph's mother, "but you couldn't trust them."

"Far too bolshy," said the old man; "couldn't let them get away with it."

Purr abandoned the subject. "And you are beginning

to rebuild the world again? That is where we shall help you."

"There's not much we can do, not just the four of us," said Ralph. "We meet all the trains; no one's turned up."

"You think no others are left alive then? You have searched perhaps?"

"It's quite difficult just keeping things going," said Ralph's mother. "Of course there's still plenty of food, as far as we know. We finished everything in Gleaning, a dear little place a few stations up the line, so we moved on here. There's a much better selection," she added with satisfaction.

"You see, Mr. Purr," said the girl who spoke for the first time, "we don't know when we shall die or if we ever shall. We think some freak of radioactivity made us immune and . . . and . . ."

"Sort of fossilised," said Ralph cheerfully. "At least we don't seem to get any older or—anything. But what good does it do?" It was stated as a fact rather than a question.

"What *do* you do?" asked Purr.

"There's quite a good golf course," said Ralph's father, "but the fairways are getting very overgrown. Takes Ralph and me all our time just to keep the greens decent. Play golf at all, Purr? No, of course you . . ." He seemed embarrassed for the first time by the interplanetary aspect of a possible golf partner.

"And of course we're a four at bridge," said Ralph's mother. "But we do miss the dogs dreadfully, and the

television. We've plenty of books, and Eva and I have our little household jobs. If only there was a good laundry. Eva dear, don't look at me like that; I can't help going back to the old days; that's all that's left really."

"Must keep going," said the old man; "get demoralised else."

"Why?" said Eva, and she meant 'why' to the first remark and did not expect an answer from any of them.

"You could breed," said Purr.

Used only to oblique and supple references, it took them some time to disentangle this remark from possible accident, even from the point of view of a Venusian, but they could find none.

"There are four of you," Purr went on, misinterpreting their silence, "two of each." There was the faintest query at the end of the sentence; he remembered his mistake about the rabbit.

"We're brother and sister," said Ralph, with more tolerance than his father could summon. After all, what about the Pharaohs, so why not the Venusians? One must make allowances for foreigners.

"I don't understand," said Purr. "Two males and two females."

"It isn't done, sir!" spluttered Ralph's father. "Dammit, man, whatever you are. Indecent suggestion. Incest."

"I see I have gone wrong again," said Purr. "You must explain."

But they couldn't, beyond a stumbling dissertation on eugenics from Ralph, with woolly examples of imbeciles and deaf mutes and the word 'cousin' cropping up regularly.

Purr said he thought it would be worth the risk; the Table of Kindred and Affinity seemed a little redundant in such a crisis. Clearly these people didn't regard it as a crisis; he wasn't sure yet about the girl. "As far as you know," he said, "you are the only people left of the human race. The future of your world rests with the four of you. And we on Venus are vitally interested too. If we annexe Earth to strengthen our position with the Martians, or even if we offer them a joint interest in exchange for non-aggression, Earth must be suitably inhabited by beings who know how to work it and who are acclimatised to its conditions."

These flights of fancy (were they threats from the outer universe?) were no more than an impending earthquake to people whose house has just burned down. No other calamity could be envisaged in the shadow of the recent one.

"You say any human being would do if not related?" said Purr.

"Not blacks," said Ralph's father, speaking with more aversion than had they been rabbits. "No damn nigger—not even a Chink (though they were our allies in the end)—will come near my daughter while I'm alive."

"We did hear," said Ralph's mother, "that there were some natives somewhere. We got them on the wireless before it gave out. Swahili, wasn't it, dear?"

"Probably breeding like flies now; do' us all in one of these days."

Purr looked at them in bewilderment. He had drunk his eighth cup of tea and 'Ralph's mother was getting anxious as to how much more hot water the pot would stand.

"Let me try to understand," he said, "for my time is short. All your lives you are accustomed to this idea yet you behave as if no one had ever spoken of it. Except you.' He turned to Eva. "You say nothing. You would say in your speech words 'No, 'no,' because that is what the others think. But inside you are saying 'Yes, let it be.' And so—yes, perhaps much the best. You and I. Let us waste no more time."

It was fortunate that he ran on in his thoughts, for there was a silence like a gaping hole.

Eva had begun to be aware of the mesmerism, as the rabbit had been; the thought had been put in her mind by Purr (was it deliberate?) that 'choice' was as much a solecism as it had been in the days of the dictators. She looked at him and felt none of the prejudices that had been instilled into her toward black and yellow and brown. Life. Life going on 'again. 'We're dead now,' she thought; 'worse, 'because we're alive without hope.' If they let this little man go there would be brief stir of talk, dying easily; then the years and the years. Or—the prowling threat that belongs in dreams?

She said, "We had better talk, then," and indicated they should go into the garden. "You see, the idea takes getting used to, and my parents are getting on." She



hesitated, for this was just what none of them were; they were permanently suspended in time, with all the time there was, yet impotent.

"I see that you are willing," Purr said. "That is best."

They had walked a little way into what had once been the garden and was now a jungle of briars and straggling shrubs. From behind a large rhododendron appeared a giant rabbit which sprang at them.

"Quick! Run!" said the girl, but neither she nor the rabbit moved. Purr looked at the rabbit speculatively, until as if at some signal from him it turned and loped off.

"I didn't know there were any so close," said Eva. "They've got very fierce, and they can be dangerous when they're angry. Ever since they became immune . . ."

"We, too, are immune from your radioactivity and your atomic explosions." It was an ultimatum.

"Oh no," she said, "you've got it all wrong. During the Atomic War a lot were killed or died at first, but then they discovered trilium and that saved us."

"Then why did your population die?" asked Purr. "Why are you the only ones left? If not atomic power?"

"Myxamotosis," said the girl. "Mother was telling you; everyone died of it; there was no treatment, no cure."

Purr had gone. In that thick undergrowth he might be anywhere, but she knew that he had vanished altogether.

"Damned impostor!" said her father. "Never thought

## VENUS AND THE RABBIT

the feller had come from Venus. Bounder too; good ride dance. Tell Ralph not to meet any more trains. I'm taking my gun to have a pot at that blasted rabbit or it'll ruin the greens. Not much left nowadays as it is."

# *The Place of the Tigress.*

ISOBEL MAYNE

SINCE he came up to read Practical Metaphysics at the University, my friend Snowboulder has at my suggestion been living in a cellar near Hyde Park. It is really only a square of ruined property that has been retained on account of its æsthetic value; he has roofed it with good soil and tropical flowers, for you will remember that one of the happiest results of the attempted Devastation was the sudden appearance of these flora. They are growing slowly in Snowboulder's earth, and droop like tipsy adolescents, trying too soon to be adult. To foster their stability, he has placed an antique ship's funnel in the centre of the roof; it serves also as a letter-box, and shoppers flying too low overhead are shocked when they peer curiously downwards, and see Snowboulder's face, aglow with philosophical exertion, leering up at them confidentially.

The location of the cellar is convenient, too, for Snowboulder's pet tigress, who can lie in the sun or frolic with the children in the Park. Not content with the socialisation of those beasts that in a previous age were termed wild, Snowboulder had until recently

engaged himself in the frivolous but fashionable hobby of developing their rudimentary logical powers.

Now if my young friend had a fault, it was a tendency to be too reasonable, a fault that might have lost him great happiness, but for an incident that occurred the other day, which enabled him to cultivate those irrational qualities that are so necessary in modern life. Hence my suggestion, that as his spirit rises too high above this earth into the air of ideas, he should accommodate his body a little below it. He was to live partially underground, as an encouragement to explore the cellars of his own mind: to root himself both physically and metaphysically, and to sleep and dream through his own half-lit underworld, instead of navigating the ether on the ideas of others.

In his case the plan was important, for great things were expected of Snowbounder. Twice he had nearly discovered the formula for which the aristocracy of the world is seeking, the formula that will explain the meaning of life. Twice it had been revealed to him in a dream, twice he woke and began to think too soon; it faded into the emptiness from which it had come, until one hot summer day I called on him and his tigress.

(When I call on Snowbounder I always walk, partly for exercise, but chiefly because when I do not want exercise and would prefer to fly, there is usually a fault in my apparatus, so you see that my feet are always firmly on the ground.)

By his lank, dreary posture, and the furtive way he shuffled the papers in front of him, I detected that he

had been reading again. I picked up a half-concealed copy of an old book that was titled *Critique of Pure Reason*. "Decadent plagiarist!" I accused him coldly. "Do you expect to come down from the University to an Under-Secretaryship at the Ministry of Philosophy? You know nothing; your mind is full of thoughts, and that is all." Taking an incinerating disc I touched with it his book and papers; they shrivelled at once, leaving him only his own self, whom he had yet to meet.

"Now how is Zoe?" I queried more kindly, and stooped to stroke the tigress, who had recently returned from a session with the local veterinary psychiatrists.

"They think it's her aggression," explained Snowbounder. "They say she may need a course of resocialisation, and there's a flaw in her relationship with me, only the statisticians haven't worked it out yet. Not that she's likely to revert, but," he continued, "they think it's significant that she snarled at a sparrow the other day."

"But oughtn't she to snarl occasionally?" I asked. "Just a little snarl sometimes? Surely it's very becoming in a tigress?"

"Not in my tigress," replied Snowbounder. "Especially in my tigress," he added meaningly. Then he explained.

He was by now certain, he said, that Zoe was trying to communicate with him on a logical basis. His experiments in expanding her reasoning ability were at last beginning to yield results. He was sorry about the slight rift in good feeling between them, and he was sorry that she had been unkind about the sparrow, but on second

thoughts he considered that her odd attitude might have been caused by the restlessness of awakening reason.

"Things are happening in that tigress," he said, "in spite of what they say. Sometimes the jargon of these veterinary psychiatrists makes me think that they are still living in the Scientific Ages. If I can make Zoe sufficiently rational," he continued, "I shall have enough material for an effective thesis, which will be some compensation for the loss of the formula. Zoe shall have her place, even if it is only a small one, in this well-ordered universe."

"And do your experiments with Zoe only include the tuition of her reason?" I asked.

"What else?" he cried testily. "How otherwise can we communicate? Would you have her teach *me*?"

Now I do deplore this pert inclination of modern students to argue with their elders. "Snowbounder," I said gravely, "remember that you are twenty and that I am hundreds of years your senior. Remember that I date from the Devastation that brought us the gift of long life instead of death. Have you forgotten that I am historical?"

He rose at once in respectful apology, and I rose too, out of respect for his youth and all the difficulties that he would deservedly face before he gained the coveted Under-Secretaryship at the Ministry. These courtesies over, we both sat down, but stood again at once in deep silence, as a butcher's pilot flew down the steps and poised by the door. He had brought Snowbounder a piece of prime zebra, a delicacy that my friend had never

tasted, and that he wanted to sample on account of its alleged properties, for it is said to aid in marshalling the slower thought processes from one part of the brain to another, without their being erased by the swifter and more destructive ideas of the chaotic part of the intellect.

We rose immediately, I say, out of respect for the butcher's pilot. The speed, accuracy and grace with which that young man placed the meat in its pretty white wrapper on the table, was most commendable. Moreover, the great love with which he performed his work shone from every angle of his flying apparatus. That butcher's pilot is a Technical Aristocrat if there ever is one.

Meanwhile, I had noticed the nostrils of Zoe twitching, and a gleam that looked old and foreign had entered her eyes. She resembled, one might say, an ancestral Zoe of five centuries ago, rather than the tigress that Snowbounder and I loved and trusted.

We escorted the butcher's pilot up the cellar steps, and watched him fly south through the minarets of Chelsea; we saw him drift over Kent like a glossy bird until he reached the Channel, then turning off our viewers we looked with our own eyes at our Metropolis.

The late afternoon was very hot, but no sun shone. London was dark with thunder and no children played in the Park. The flowers on the cellar roof had unaccountably lost their fragility; they stood still and tough in the heavy air, no longer adolescents, but suddenly middle-aged flowers, and very slightly cynical. When

we descended again to the cellar, which 'is not equipped with coolers, we might have been entering a jungle.

Through the dark air Snowboulder tried to talk and I tried to listen; Zoe stood and sniffed the air, then sat down. Snowboulder began a half-hearted argument and fell asleep in the middle of it. Soor I dozed, too. Only Zoe remained awake; the gleam in her eyes swelled and strengthened, until it flowed through the silent cellar like a river, but before I fell finally asleep, I was nearly certain that 'I saw something playing around her jaw that, translated into human terms, was nothing less than a quiet but decided smirk.

The enchanted waters of sleep ebb all too soon in these afternoons of high summer. Snowboulder's voice, hoarse and ecstatic, recalled me from that witchery where there is no time but only a space of slumber. The waters sank, and sank again, landing me dry and hard as a rock on the topmost disappointed peak of consciousness.

I deciphered through his incoherence that he had again dreamed his formula. He cried that he could remember it, but that if it was not written down at once he would forget it for ever. He demanded, in the name of humanity and all creation, a pen and paper. Finding a pen in his own tunic pocket, he groped for the papers which I had earlier destroyed, then with a shout noticed the white wrapper on the table, and moved with all speed towards it. Just then I saw that Zoe was moving, too.

"Snowboulder!" I cried. "Don't go near that table!"



He did not wish to hear, and throwing himself at the wrapper, he wrote vigorously. When he raised his hands and head he had recorded the secret of life, and the eyes that met mine were the eyes of a man who believes that he is God.

At that exact moment Zoe sprang. A shining shape, she seared the air and struck the cellar aglow. Geometric and total, she leapt from the heart of her own alien, animal universe, narrowing and narrowing our senses, until we were two thin, frail shells, lost on a golden, flowing sheet of life. Zoe had reverted.

The moment after Snowbounder had raised his hands from the wrapper, and before Zoe swallowed the formula, seems now to have erased itself from time sequence. One could only say that one second the formula was inside Snowbounder, and the same second it had gone into Zoe.

A long time after she had cleaned her face, rolled over twice with her paws in the air, and then fallen into a satisfied sleep, I dared to look at Snowbounder. I saw that the God-look had left his eyes; his expression was dilapidated, yet not unhappy. Somewhere inside his tigress was a formula that would have brought him wealth and distinction, but he did not seem to mind.

"Did you see her?" he said slowly. "Was that something more alive than anything most of us can remember? Did you see?"

"Snowbounder," I reminded him sadly, "she has your formula."

"Of course she has it," he cried. "Now I see that she

has always had it. I tried to teach her reason and to make her like me, but we are unlike; we are the parts of a whole that must always be different, otherwise there could be no wholeness. I tried to make life into logic, and could only transcribe the conceited symbol of myself. She has devoured my formula, for she is larger than a tenuous cipher. I do not know what mystery of wisdom has prompted her to select the exact and necessary time in my life to tell me, but she has chosen it well."

I could but agree. There may be, of course, even in these enlightened days, vulgar casuists who will point dubiously to the fact that while Snowbounder was writing his formula, he tore the meat wrapper slightly. They will surely say that the odour that assailed Zoe's nostrils like a nostalgic perfume, released her archaic instincts. It does not matter; those of refined intellect will rejoice, for from that afternoon my friend Snowbounder learned humility of his tigress.

Zoe still plays with the children in the Park, but daily she reverts. Snowbounder watches her fondly, and will hear nothing of rehabilitation schemes. Soon he will send her to her ancestral home across the sea; he can bear to part with her, for that golden, God-given leap is now his own quintessence. He remains reasonable, but in tempered fashion. He, too, sometimes plays with the children in the Park, and he likes to lie full-length in the sun on summer days. He does not sit so late over his books, but sometimes enjoys prowling at night through the trees and under the moon.

## THE PLACE OF THE TIGRESS

I do not visit him so often now, but leave him alone with that other self whom he has met at last. As I said, he is still very rational, but often when I am passing by his cellar, I hear his voice rise from the antique ship's funnel in an odd and happy song, and then I know that eternity is in his heart, and that he is just a little irrational, too.

## *Another 'Antigone*

D. A. C. MORRISON

SHE did not realise at first that the Professor was speaking to her. The other students looked faintly surprised. It was quite an honour to be asked to fetch the brains. One usually waited, alert with hope, for the choice to fall.

"Althea, would you kindly bring us Sir Arthur Croom?" The Professor's tone had taken a touch of annoyance.

Althea scurried off to the shelves. As she thumbed through the catalogue, she thought, 'For the last time.'

The plastic container slid easily out of its groove. The grey convolutions gleamed through the oily preservative and the transparent lid, as she carried it over to the body-box.

"We therefore see that, on the Northern side, the statesmen had a very poor insight into the factors making for conflict," droned the Professor. Correctly guessing that this was the cue for Sir Arthur's examination, Althea fitted his container into the brain-cavity and switched to 'activity'.

'For the last time,' she thought again. She remem-

bered the first time: the physiology class; old Hsien leaning back like an idol in his chair and piping out the achievements of the last five hundred years——

"The secrets of the body we have unlocked. The body-box you see before you, though it does not look like a body—unless some of you think there is a certain resemblance to mine?—can perform all the body's functions. It lacks only one thing—the brain, the last portion of the human organism to keep secrets from us. But if we cannot yet make a synthetic brain, we can preserve the vitality of already existing brains. When the brain of any of the selected persons who have died in the last five hundred years is inserted into the body-box, and the appropriate amount of blood-substitute and secretion-fluid is caused to circulate, the brain can be linked with the synthetic body, and is thus enabled, in some degree, to function as it did in life. The resultant organism can understand and reason; it can even speak to us, through the speech-vent, here. For obvious reasons of economy we have limited the motor functions; we do not wish the dead to be able to walk! We keep only a few body-boxes, but many brains. Now, Sergius, if you will just insert the brain-box—so—we will begin. Switch to 'activity' but keep the sound-control at zero.

"You may have wondered why the brains are inserted five minutes before they are required to speak. I will show you. It is not uninteresting. Sergius, turn the sound-control to 'full'."

Althea, remembering, shivered as she re-lived the

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moment when she had heard for the first time, bursting metallic from the slatted speech-vent, the sound that had never since left her imagination and her dreams.

First, a low groan; then an untranslatable murmur; then words, some comprehensible—a rush of words as in delirium——

“Peace! Give me peace! Why do you wake me? Why drag me back?” The tone was harsh with longing, grief, terror.

“You see?” said Hsien. “They all do this. After five minutes or so they seem to pass from their despair into an emotional condition of hopelessness, during which, nevertheless, their intellects function adequately enough for our purposes. It is then possible to question them upon events of interest. But there is no need to listen every time to their cries, and it interrupts the lecture: so for five minutes we keep the speech control at zero. Listen, already he is becoming tired of shouting. . . .”

Althea had seen that the cries were only an additional curiosity to the class. She was not altogether unprepared for this: of all her friends she alone saw anything to be troubled about in the euthanasia of infants of lesser intelligence, in the ‘voluntary’ mating of highly-talented psyches. When they read the history of the Revolt of the Soulers, those last unfortunate believers in an immaterial part of the mind, whose descendants were said to be living out their barbarian lives in exile upon a distant constellation, it was only she who seemed to have the ridiculous impulse to wish that the beaten side had won.

She said nothing to anyone of these doubts. She had

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no wish to be exiled herself, or taken in any other way out of the pleasant, stable world. But when she heard those cries a new and deeper revulsion rose within her and called her to act.

Three years had gone by since she had first heard them. Old Hsien had died, and his brain now sat with the others on the shelves: she had even heard it wearily answering questions about the state of education fifty years before.

She had watched and waited. Now she was ready to act.

"Sound-control up, Althea, *please!*" The Professor's petulant voice once again broke into her thoughts. She turned the dial.

"Good morning, Sir Arthur," said the Professor. "We are examining the causes of the ten years' hot-war between North and South Earth, which began four hundred and sixty-two years ago. You, as Prime Minister of the North, will no doubt recollect the Conference of Lagos, which was held a year before the outbreak of the war."

"Yes," said the speech-vent. The voice was, as usual, flat, dead, hopeless.

"Try to remember the agenda for the Conference. There was one point to which I believe you attached great importance: the freedom of the Trade Unions. Would you mind telling us why you regarded this point as being of particular importance?"

"My opinion was," boomed the measured voice, "that without free Unions no healthy state could exist."

"Your reasons?"

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"First, because the sense of freedom contributed materially to the productivity of the workers. Secondly . . ."


The melancholy dialogue droned on. Through the transparent walls and roof shone the gently warming sun of a perfect June day. Earth, mother of human stars, had never looked so ravishingly beautiful. Her trees waved softly in the wind, her clouds moved on like ancient ships; and all this natural beauty seemed in some forgotten way to be saying to Althea that what she was going to do was good.

Somehow, drawn out by her impatience, the last lecture hour of the day wore away. The scuffle of the departing class-members died into silence. She was alone in the brain library. It was time.

No one was likely to come in—it was a Social Evening—but she locked the doors. Then she walked back to the body-box. She read on the label: Sir Arthur Croom. Her routine task now was to remove the brain and enter the lecture up on his card.

Instead (it is beginning, she thought) she switched to 'activity' and turned the sound-control to 'full'. As the voice began to rise and fall in broken, humiliated appeal—"Sleep! Let me sleep!"—she interrupted:

"I am going to give you what you wish."

There was a long pause. She could almost imagine that all the long rows of dead brains on the shelves were listening. } 

"I—beg your pardon?" The words sounded oddly, pathetically formal.



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"I am going to give you rest—you and all the others here."

"This is some trick? Some devilish test? Who are you?" The questions came tumbling.

"My name is Althea. I am a student here. I am acting by myself in this matter. I do not think as the others do; I believe you should have—sleep."

"If that is true—God bless you!" said the voice, trembling slightly. Althea noted dispassionately how strange it was to hear these words, which she had so often read in the literature of the past, spoken with real meaning.

"What are you going to do?"

"It is quite simple. I have studied chemistry. Your brains are kept in a preserving fluid. If this is decomposed, they will be destroyed. The decompository agent is not hard to prepare; I have it here. I will mix it, in the form of an emulsion, with the air in this room. It will enter the brain-boxes by the ventilating holes. The dissolution will be instantaneous."

The very act of speaking the words, of confiding her purpose to another person—if this jumble of plastic, wire and preservative could be called a person—filled her with a sudden doubt. She entered again the maze of internal argument and conflict, whose every turn she knew.

"I must think," she said in a low voice.

The brain did not reply: but a terrible silence, full of its fear and expectation, fell upon the room.

'The benefit of the whole is supreme.' The proverb, the motto of her upbringing, rang in her ears with all

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its soothing certainty. It could not be doubted that the possession of the brains benefited the human universe. Living history helped to train administrators, contemplatives, scientists. And yet—there was that cry.

Ah, but how in such a matter could she trust an impulse of pure sentiment, an attitude of mind only too easily explained by her psychological history? Reading and re-reading her personal analysis, she had built up link by link the exact chain of causation, the unfortunate experiences and accidents, which had made her the odd one out, the lover of lost causes. Yet it was not those experiences only—she was heretically, desperately sure of it—that had given rise to her impulse.

And the fear began again. She could not escape being found out. What penalty would be imposed? The penalties for crime were never announced; crime was rare. Would they torture her body or her soul—or remove her from life? Against the fear she suddenly felt that she had no defence. There was no sure principle whose certainty she could set against the certainties of her upbringing, which towered menacingly over her, holding in their hands the terrible weapon of a secret revenge.

She could not bring herself to say in words that she had changed her mind. She made as if to leave the room, then realised that, if life was to go on after all, Sir Arthur would have to be neatly tucked away in his place on the shelves.

She actually had her fingers on the brain-box when the voice came again:

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"Believe me, I—understand."

She had expected protest, lamentation. The calm, resigned assent unnerved her. She burst into tears.

"My dear girl," said the voice compassionately. "There is some penalty attached to what you proposed to do?"

She nodded her head.

"What would they do to you?"

"It doesn't matter."

"I think it does. I appreciate that it sounds rather a stupid statement in view of my present—circumstances; but I should not feel entirely happy about accepting the sacrifice of—shall we say—your life. Please don't feel bad about it. And if in the future you would ever like to have a chat——"

Something in its own remark seemed to amuse the brain. It began to laugh. The laughter rose higher and higher, and began at its height to be mingled with sobs. Pity began to enter Althea's heart again. But courage was not there. To gain a little time, she said:

"There are many questions I have longed to ask you."

"I am at your disposal." Something of the leaden resignation, so familiar to her from the lecture hour, was coming back into the voice.

"I don't mean the kind of question they're always asking you. I mean questions about—the forbidden things."

"Forbidden things?"

"In history we read of music and of poetry." The words, as she pronounced them, sounded old and unmeaning. "Such things have long been forbidden to

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human society. They are said to create instability. Could you—say to me a poetry?”

“How Plato would smile!” said Sir Arthur, using a name Althea had never heard. “Yes, I’ll say some poetry to you. Let me see now—perhaps a piece of love-poetry?—or is love too forbidden in your stable world?”

“Sober, factual love is a primary requisite of social stability,” quoted Althea from the Proverbs.

“Quite so. Now listen:

“O mistress mine, where are you roaming?  
O stay and hear, your true love’s coming  
That can sing both high and low . . .”

Deepened by feeling, the voice spoke on; and Althea listened with a confusing, ever-widening delight. When the voice was silent, she said after a little:

“That is good.”

“Yes, it is good. There is another poem,” he went on after a pause. “A poem three thousand years old, which has come into my mind, I expect because it is about a woman who was like you. She was like you because she did very much what you had it in mind to do to-night. Her brother lay unburied outside the walls of the city. The ruler of the city forbade her to bury him, and all the weight and majesty of the law was on his side. But this woman dared to disobey him, and when he challenged her she said:

“ ‘Your proclamations

Have not the power in them to make me transgress

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The unwritten, unchanging laws of God  
Which live not for to-day, not for yesterday, but  
for ever,  
And no man knows what their beginning was.' "

"What was her name?" said Althea absently. It was not what she had meant to say, but her attention was bent upon something she could see, or thought she could see, in the distance, through the transparent wall. Could they be lights, coming her way?

"Antigone," said the voice, softly.

They were lights.

The words of the poem still chimed with her secret thoughts. Now that they were visibly coming to discover her it all seemed much easier.

"I must be quick," she whispered. "Are you ready?"

The voice murmured something which sounded like "Lord, into thy hands . . ." She pressed the switch of the spray-gun. There was a slight hissing sound, and the air was misted.

"Are you there?" she said hoarsely.

There was silence. She had given them silence.

The doors burst open.

A week later, she was walking towards the courtroom. What awaited her there she did not know. She had heard rumours that rebels were sometimes sent on a six-year journey to the barbarian star of exile where life was still lived as it had been lived three hundred years ago. With all her heart she prayed that this might be her sentence.

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The Professor walked by her side. He sounded sad and perplexed:

"I shall never fully understand this business, Althea. I feel no anger now, but chiefly pity for you. You are so young."

Althea smiled as she walked, and seemed to mutter something.

"What's that?" said the Professor, startled.

"What's to come is still unsure," said Althea, proudly, to his uncomprehending ears.

# *Spud Failure Definite*

NOEL PEART

**BELFAST 1108 SPUD FAILURE DEFINITE. FOOD PRICE INDEX 191. PRIORITY.**

The Irish potato hadn't failed for years and the population figures were outrageous. A failure meant immediate starvation. Unless the Irish were fed, they would die, and Manley would be blamed. Manley was UGG. Comptroller (West) and he was expected to provide food for all famine areas. It kept him busy. When he prevented famines, populations increased. A population increase invariably meant a famine. That was the problem for Administration. UGG. (West) were executive and they had problems of their own.

Manley picked up his Assistant-Comptroller's Report and read through it. Hutton respectfully submitted that the indications suggested that famine conditions might shortly prevail in Ireland. Ample supplies of Mussican were available. He quoted the figure in millions of bales. Manley knew all this. Mouse breeding was the main industry of the Chinese people and salted mouse

meat was the staple with which UGG. relieved all famines everywhere. Spitefully, he pressed a button and the figure for present reserves lit up on a screen in front of him. Apparently Hutton had done the same because his figure was correct. Manley read on.

Hutton respectfully submitted that two thousand five hundred 100-ton consignments of Mussican should be airlifted to selected points and distributed through local centres. He reported that 240 transport aircraft were available at transport pool. Presumably there was sufficient fuel for the trip from Reserve Depot to the selected dropping points and back. He assumed that pilots could be drawn from pilot pool. In conclusion, he suggested that the matter should be given a priority and respectfully begged to submit.

Manley rang down for Hutton. When he came, Manley waved him to a chair. He said:

"This Report is no good."

"Why not?" said Hutton.

"Well, for a start, will the Irish eat mouse meat?"

"Why not?" said Hutton, amazed.

"Something to do with their religion. I think they are not allowed to touch it. Who is the Irish expert in this outfit, anyway?"

"I don't know," said Hutton. "I didn't know we had one."

"Well, for heaven's sake, get out of here and find out," said Manley. "If you know nothing, you might at least do something."

It turned out that they had an Irish expert called



Lokey. Hutton found him in the typists' room and rushed him upstairs.

Manley said, "The first thing is, will the Irish eat mouse meat?"

"Why not?" said Lokey.

Hutton looked modest, Manley slightly puzzled.

"I thought it was against their religion or something."

"No," said Lokey, "it's human flesh they won't eat. The Pope forbade it after the Kameroun affair."

Manley pointed out to Hutton that this was the sort of definite information that an Assistant was supposed to obtain and furnish to a Comptroller. Instead of Hutton checking all necessary details and supplying a proper recommendation, he didn't even know whether they had an Irish expert in the building. Hutton looked modest.

Manley passed to the question of suitably selected dropping points. He asked Lokey to produce a map and show him the most suitable distribution centres. Lokey had no map, but said they could requisition one from UGG. (Mps.). He said he didn't think there had been a famine in Ireland before. Manley said he didn't think he had ever had to deal with a famine on an island and it certainly raised novel distribution problems. He added that he got absolutely no assistance from his Department, which must have dealt with hundreds of island famines and possess dozens of accurate files on measures adopted, all of which any fool could find if he took the trouble to look for them. For the moment, all he wanted to know was whether the Belfast Govern-

ment had adequate equipment to undertake the distribution if he put the Mussican down at "selected dropping points". The tone in which he said 'selected dropping points' made it clear that Manley considered that any competent assistant would have furnished him with a ready-marked map annexed to his report. Hutton wondered if there was a map of Ireland in the Department.

Lokey thought the views of the Belfast Government would have to be taken into account. For himself he very much doubted if they were competent to undertake distribution. He reminded Manley that tens of millions of the population were illiterate peasants at the lowest level of subsistence and entirely dependent on the potato crop. Communications between the Belfast Government and the Western and Southern Districts of the country were extremely precarious, roads were practically non-existent, and all the necessary business of collecting statistics was done through Parochial Organisations, or possibly, he thought, through Parish Priests. The only possible way of distributing supplies would be on a parochial basis and Lokey simply did not know if the Belfast administration had the necessary helihoppers. If they had the necessary helihoppers and enough pilots to fly them, he thought their Statistical Department was strong enough to deal with the allocation and distribution of Mussican, if Manley could fly it in. Further than that, Lokey thought it would be reckless to commit oneself.

Manley rang for dictation and spoke through the dicta-tube on the desk. UGG. communications started to

flow in all directions. Belfast were asked to supply figures for helihoppers and pilots available, estimated ability to handle Mussican and selected dropping points with bearings and radar identification for two thousand five hundred 100-ton drops when available. Aircraft Pool at Strasburg were to confirm 240 planes available, furnish certificates of airworthiness, details of pilot availability and supplies of fuel estimated against a round trip carrying 100-ton loads to limit of flight and return empty. UGG. Main Reserve Depot at Lemberg was alerted to pack one quarter-million tons Mussican in 100-ton loads and hold ready for immediate transport to Ireland.

All this was routine for every famine and could have been done by the office boy. Manley glared at Hutton and asked him if he had any further suggestions. Hutton shook his head and was waved contemptuously out of the room. Lokey said the Irish had once had a form of wheeled transport called a Jaunting Car—but he was satisfied that the distribution could not be made on any basis other than by helihopper to parish centre. If it were, the entire supplies would be diverted into the hands of black-market profiteers. Manley said he never overlooked that possibility, and that the conference was now ended, but Lokey was to hold himself alert and prepare all necessary maps and documents. Lokey had no maps and no idea what documents to prepare, but it seemed wiser to leave without comment.

Belfast replied with quite unexpected promptitude. They identified their dropping area as Nutting Air Strip

## SPUD FAILURE DEFINITE

giving exact bearings and radar beacon.FF. 40 seconds. They had enough pilots but no helihoppers and asked for assistance. Hutton passed it straight to Manley and got a first-class rocket for his pains. Manley said that routine matters were expected to be dealt with at Assistant-Comptroller level and that he considered Hutton's salary justified his exercising his own intelligence once in a while. He said surely Hutton could make the necessary communications to Aircraft Pool and to Helihopper Pool for Belfast assistance.

Hutton accordingly furnished Nutting Air Strip bearings and beacon to Central Aircraft Pool at Strasburg and directed them to lift one-quarter million tons from Lemberg to Nutting forthwith. He communicated the request for helihopper assistance to Central Helihopper Pool.

Lemberg reported two hours later. They said they were in a position to load 75,000 tons by lorry immediately. They were proceeding with loading arrangements and awaited destination orders. The balance would be dealt with by returning lorries on round trip basis. Hutton did not like to worry Manley with this Departmental misunderstanding. He cabled politely:

"Ireland is an island. Kindly cancel instructions load lorries."

He should have said—'your local instructions'. Unfortunately Lemberg treated his cable as cancelling the entire loading instructions previously received. The

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mistake caused a deal of confusion. Aircraft Pool at Strasburg had organised transport aircraft to fly into Lemberg by groups of 25 planes which was all the Lemberg Air Strip could carry at one time. When the first 25 planes landed, no Mussican was available for loading. The aircraft could not remain upon the Air Strip as the next group had already taken off. Neither could they return to Strasburg as the airfield at Strasburg was fully occupied flying off the third detachment. In the end, it was necessary to divert them to Stockholm, which seemed to be the only place where they could get enough fuel for their final return to Strasburg. It caused considerable delay. When Manley heard about it, he only shook his head. It was evidently going to be a bad famine.

On the following day, Hutton had his only original idea. He devoted the whole day to preparing a Memorandum for UGG. (Adm.). He pointed out that the occurrence of famine on an island raised a whole series of problems fundamentally different from the problems involved in dealing with famine on the mainland. He was able to give a number of examples of the problems. He therefore respectfully submitted for consideration that UGG. should establish a separate headquarters for dealing with problems connected with island famines. A skeleton staff of Administrators chosen from the experienced groups already established could set up the headquarters and establish an efficient routine for coping with famines occurring in areas entirely surrounded by water. In conclusion, he respectfully begged to submit.

Meanwhile, the position in Ireland had become really alarming. F.P. Index had gone to figures which the experienced Manley believed to represent flights of fancy on the part of a terrified staff rather than genuine statistics based on research figures. Belfast now suggested abandoning Nutting Air Strip and making the drops at selected dropping points. They did not furnish their selected dropping points nor even maps from which a statistical analysis of the best dropping points could have been made. Lokey produced a map on which he had marked what he said were selected dropping points, but he gave no aircraft identification. It was obvious to Manley that without bearings or radar beacons, the transport pilots could not find Lokey's selected dropping points. He told Hutton to have Lokey's dropping points plotted and to furnish navigation directions to the transport pilots.

Hutton furnished Lokey's maps to Belfast with a request to prepare navigational bearings for the selected dropping points and transmit them direct to Central Aircraft Pool at Strasburg as soon as possible.

Belfast mapping was one of their most efficient Departments. They were able to plot Lokey's selected dropping points very quickly and prepare accurate bearings for each point. Detailed instructions were rushed to Strasburg.

The complication which ensued showed the error of changing a plan once it was accepted. Lokey's maps were based upon his original hypothesis of distributing the Mussican by helicopter after an original drop at

## SPUD FAILURE DEFINITE

Nutting Air Strip. His 'selected dropping points' were helihopper dropping points. Helihoppers operate at roof-top height and Belfast mapping had very properly and sensibly prepared helihopper bearings. Central Aircraft Pool at Strasburg operated with a winged jet-propelled aircraft flying at about 600 m.p.h. at 50,000 feet. The navigators couldn't take bearings on helihopper landmarks such as 'On village green, straw-covered pump' or 'At entrance to village, ruined shrine'. Strasburg returned the entire folder to Hutton, saying that transport aircraft could not fly on helihopper bearings and they awaited his further instructions.

Manley blamed Hutton for this mix up, but it wasn't really Hutton's fault. Either Lokey should have been told before he made his maps that Belfast wanted direct delivery by transport aircraft to selected dropping points or Hutton should have been told that Lokey was still working on helihoppers. There had been a breakdown in inter-office communications.

Manley realised that he now had selected helihopper dropping points and identification for distribution from Nutting Air Strip. He decided to take over control himself and revert to his original plan of a bulk drop at Nutting.

The whole Departmental organisation was thrown into the battle. Manley found fuel for the aircraft and had it transported to Strasburg. He nipped a threatened pilot strike in the bud by threatening to cut off all food supplies to Central Aircraft Pool. He got the necessary bales of Mussican ready at Lemberg in 100-ton loads and

synchronised the arrival of aircraft to load it. Pilots were furnished written orders directing them to Nutting Air Strip with all necessary bearings and radar beacon charts. He actually got this gigantic operation moving on time and to schedule.

Meanwhile, at Hutton's instructions, Helihopper Pool had shifted 140 helihoppers to Nutting Air Strip. Pilots were available and Manley was able to supply selected dropping points with helihopper bearings and identification. The operation should have worked and the final hitch which occurred in Belfast was no fault of UGG. (West). The day after Hutton's helihoppers put down at Nutting, a famine-crazed rabble of Irish peasants burst into Belfast and surrounded Government buildings. For the safety of their own personnel and to protect invaluable statistical records, the Belfast Government thought it prudent to take over the 140 helihoppers under cover of darkness and remove themselves to London until conditions at home should become more normal.

As a result, when Manley's quarter million tons of Mussican floated down on the Nutting Air Strip, there were neither the organisation nor the machinery to distribute it. The Belfast rabble feasted fat, but with the best will in the world they could not consume a quarter of a million tons of food. Most of it decayed and had to be buried.

It was a bad famine. It created a new record in Manley's department by reducing the population of Ireland for the time being to a figure below 'population



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(normal food resources)'. This meant that Ireland was, for the time being, the only place in the world where human life could continue, statistically.

The extent of the disaster drew the attention of UGG. (Adm.). All the files were sent for and carefully studied. As a result UGG. (Adm.) decided upon the tremendous step of creating an entire new department. They expropriated a building scheme in Huddersfield for offices and filled them with an organisation containing almost as many people as had perished in the Irish famine. Hutton was promoted and appointed to control the new station.

ASST.-COMPTROLLER UGG. (WEST) HUTTON TO BE  
COMPTROLLER UGG. (ISLANDS) WITH SENIORITY FROM  
MAY 1ST. PROCEED EARLIEST HUDDERSFIELD CON-  
GRATULATIONS. UGG. (ADM.).

# *The Three Brothers*

WILLIAM MOY RUSSELL

IN the year 2500, in the city of Alpha on the third continent of the fourth planet of the seventeenth system, there lived an aged and industrious widower who practised a humble and innocent calling. He serviced the seventy-ninth rack of the third assembly of the great computer in the City Hall.

This good old man had three sons.

The eldest, Cathodus, was a distinguished physicist, and his father expected great things from him.

Almost as eminent was the second son, Census, a sociopsychotechnologist. This young man, his father felt, would go far.

But the third son, Biophile, was a grave disappointment. The fixing of the boy's sagacity quotient had occasioned a violent controversy about the status in psychology of complex numbers. From infancy, he had utterly destroyed every piece of technical apparatus with which he was incautiously entrusted. A brilliant future might naturally have been predicted for him in sociology, but alas! he had an unshakable trust in the disinterested-

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ness of his fellow-humans. After failing in every examination, he was unwisely deputed to sweep the floor of his eldest brother's laboratory. Fortunately for the physicist, he sat at the time on a committee in whose findings Census was keenly interested. After the third explosion, a brotherly agreement was reached, and the young man found himself employed as a clerk in the office of Census. Here he at once distinguished himself by showing some of his brother's papers to a courteous visitor who expressed a friendly interest in them in their owner's absence. The boy's father—in despair—succeeded in obtaining for him a post in a distant and isolated weather station, where all the apparatus was automatic and heavily protected. The elder brothers deplored this excess of parental zeal in a culture where euthanasia was permitted.

His exile in the weather station caused Biophile no distress. Here he could gratify at leisure his one interest—the study of the lower animals. With tireless patience, he would observe their habits, study their simple tastes, and train them to perform little services for which they were always honourably rewarded. In the society of the vulture and the praying mantis, he found an agreeable change from that of the colleagues of Census, and if any philosopher had pointed out that the brains of his humble friends were machines, he would justly have observed that they responded more intelligibly and reliably than any machines he had previously met with, and that even if you made a mistake, you had only to climb a tree, run a long way, or immerse yourself to the

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nostrils in the nearest stream. Nor did these machines ever explode.

Here, therefore, he had remained for several years, perfecting himself in his inglorious but not unexacting art. The short row of figures which, each year, he read off a panel and sent to the city authorities, was always incorrectly recorded, but his father, by manipulating his section of the city computer, allowed for the error so successfully that the appointment cannot have cost the planet more than a few million credits' worth of property destroyed by hurricanes or floods.

## 2

One day in this year, as the old servicer plied his soldering-iron, the wall-speaker called for attention, and uttered a memorable announcement:

"His Efficiency, the System Coordinator, announces that his daughter is of marriageable age. After consultation with the Eugenics Committee, he is pleased to give notice that the lady's hand will be awarded to any candidate whatsoever who passes the usual test selected to demand the qualities of a future Coordinator. The test appointed on this occasion is the location of the temple of Geras on the second planet of the twelfth system, and the acquisition of the priceless ampoule of the anti-ageing drug Hebe, which is secreted in this temple. The successful candidate must present the ampoule to the Coordinator at the palace."

The old man's heart leaped for joy. His shift com-

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pleted, he hastened to his apartment, where all three sons had assembled on the occasion of his birthday, and told them the auspicious news.

Cathodus remarked that he would celebrate his inauguration as Coordinator by making his father Head of the Computer Service. Census, with a tolerant smile at his senior's optimism, promised his father the post of Mayor of the City. To everyone's surprise, Biophile timidly suggested, in his rustic phraseology, that they should not put all the eggs in two baskets, and begged leave to try his hand.

The old servicer divided most of his savings between the elder brothers. Moved partly by paternal fondness, and partly by planetary patriotism—for after all the young man would be removed from the system for some time—he gave Biophile a small sum and his blessing. The two seniors insisted that Biophile must set out last, and not embarrass them by his presence. Privately they agreed that on their return it would be high time to secure their senile parent's classification as mentally defective. And so, one by one, the three brothers went forth on the adventure.

### 3

Scarcely had Cathodus landed his magnificent spaceship—manufactured to his design, and with the Cathodus plus-drive installed—upon the planet indicated, when he addressed himself to the task of locating the mysterious temple. Relying on ancient reports of the

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climate and rock formation of the region where it was hidden, and on a few meteorological and geophysical surveys of his own, he constructed a set of equations and fed them to the Mark VI Cathodus computer aboard his ship. He soon had precise co-ordinates for the position of the temple. Taking with him a number of ingenious gadgets, he set off in a magnificent land vehicle, costing most of his share of the patrimony.

It was unfortunate that an error in the seventeenth decimal place at one stage of his preliminary computations was substantially magnified later on. Thus it came about that he started off in the direction diametrically opposite that of the temple. When he reached the coast of the ocean which occupies most of the planet, he refused to revise his opinion and spent the remainder of his credits on the hire of a magnificent ocean craft. By the time Census arrived, he was a small spot disappearing into the open sea.

Census had obtained the most splendid berth aboard a passenger space-liner, thanks to some information he had prudently acquired about one of the directors of the line. He had carefully studied the planetary cultures, and having succeeded—by brilliant extrapolation from its complicated exogamy tables—in finding natives of the right degree of consanguinity with those in the temple service, he played on their savage mores and superstitions and induced them—free of charge—to act as guides and bearers. The safari set out—in the right direction.

It was unfortunate that Census had overlooked a detail

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of local culture which went far to counteract his subtle inducements, namely an immemorially ancient priestly custom of skinning alive natives who betrayed the whereabouts of the temple. In the middle of a vast and trackless desert, his entire party deserted, taking all his money and practically all his stores. Lost, with few supplies and no vehicle—he had been carried in a litter—Census wandered miserably in the desert.

Biophile had managed to reach the crucial planet through the kind offices of his father, who arranged for him to work his passage as cook on a small tramp spacer, having ascertained that the galley was nowhere near the more important machinery. Apart from a habit of absent-mindedly providing the crew with meals of bran mash or live maggots, the boy performed his duties creditably, and since the planet was the first port of call, he reached it. He had brought some of his most devoted pets—a hive of honey-bees, a bat, and an electric eel in a tank.

Now the priests relied chiefly for the keeping of their secret on the practice already mentioned. They felt free to trade with the other natives, and some of the articles they produced were exported from the planet by native middle-men. Among these exports were specimens of a beautiful and odorous flowering plant, which grew in profusion in the neighbourhood of the temple, and nowhere else. At the weather station, Biophile had amused himself by training his little colony of bees to seek out cunningly hidden flowers. On returning to the hive, these sociable creatures are wont to express their

pleasure in a lively dance, the forms of which convey to less fortunate colleagues the direction and distance of the treasures they have found. By long study, Biophile had mastered this choreographic language, and read it as well as any honey-bee. It happened that the last flowers used in his experiments had been of the very species that grew by the temple.

On landing, Biophile set up his hive, and let his bees out for air-riding. Hardy and rapid travellers, they set out to sample this new environment.

When the first scout bees returned, Biophile was musing on the difficulty of his task. His eye was caught by the animated scene at the hive entrance, where the explorers were signalling their success in no uncertain, if un verbal, terms. From habit, Biophile reconstructed and mapped their journey. Only then did he recall the last food these foragers had been trained to report on, and realise that his first problem was solved.

He at once determined to make his brothers the partners of his good fortune. Luckily their behaviour had greatly amused the natives, and at the expense of most of his little store of credits he located them, recalled Cathodus from his voyage, rescued Census from the desert, and procured a battered but serviceable vehicle. The elder brothers showed no gratitude, ascribed his discovery to idiot's luck, abused him for tardiness in collecting them, and insisted that he must wait his turn on arrival at the temple. Biophile cheerfully assented. They also objected to taking his pets in the car, already loaded with the apparatus of Cathodus,



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but grudgingly assented to his bringing the eel, the bat and a few of his favourite bees. The hive was left at the space-port.

### 4

After traversing deserts, jungles and swamps, with poor Biophile driving day and night, they finally reached the site of the temple. It stood on an island in the middle of a forbidding lake, stocked, local natives assured them with pleasure, with schools of ferocious water monsters.

Smiling at these terrors, Cathodus produced a heavily armoured diving-suit. Biophile helped him into it, and he plunged boldly under the water and strode over the bed of the lake.

Regrettably, there was a small defect in the mechanism for oxygen supply, which failed when he was some distance from the island. When his reappearance was so long delayed, the horrified Biophile wished to attempt a rescue, but Census restrained him, insisting that his turn was next. He had played on the savage mores and superstitions of a party of local natives, and induced them to give him a boat, in which he now embarked. Not till he reached the middle of the lake did he realise they had drilled a large hole in it. The boat filled and sank, and Census, shrieking, disappeared into the water.

Biophile hesitated no longer. He had already put on a suit of rubber, which experience had taught him to wear when bathing in the company of his electric eel. Clutching the latter firmly, and pushing before him the

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boxes containing his bees and his bat, he swam across the lake. The eel expressed its displeasure at the firmness of his grip in no uncertain volts. Water monsters approached eagerly, only to retreat in dismay, or sink as if poleaxed to the bottom. Biophile reached the island, rescuing *en route* Cathodus, almost suffocated, and Census, badly bitten.

On their recovery, the two abused Biophile for his slowness in coming to their help. They warned him to keep out of their way on the island, and assured him that on their return home they would speak firmly to his father and take his disposal into their own hands. Biophile listened apologetically, and assented to everything.

### 5

The priests received them courteously. They were clearly impressed at finding any travellers who had come so far. They proposed to give them a sporting chance at the last test, but told them with smiles of child-like pleasure of its extreme difficulty and of the penalties for failure. The ampoule, they said, rested on a small ledge at the top of a tall tower in the centre of the island. The tower was windowless, and no lights were permitted inside it. It was completely full, from a few feet above ground level to its lofty top, of wires stretched back and forth in an intricate net work, the lightest touch on any of which would cause an alarm to sound, whereupon the culprit would be dragged out and stoned to death.

Undismayed, Cathodus entered the tower, taking

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with him a small package. He had constructed a small guided missile, equipped with radar to obviate collisions with obstacles, radio-controlled and provided with small padded clamps at its nose, with which to pick up the ampoule. He had only to release the little flyer at the bottom of the tower, direct it to the top, and recall it. The missile would automatically avoid the wires.

Unfortunately, there was a slight imperfection in one of the feed-back circuits for the steering controls. Half-way up the tower, the missile blundered into a wire and set off the alarm. The wretched physicist was dragged out and stoned to death.

Biophile was with difficulty prevented from intervening by the more prudent Census, who pointed out the impropriety of interfering clumsily with the workings of a delicately balanced primitive culture.

Census did not intend to enter the tower. Having studied the cultural overtones of the native religion, he began to play upon the savage mores and superstitions of the priests, hoping to induce them simply to give him the ampoule. They were made of sterner and less devious stuff than their fellow-natives. He had not spoken three sentences when they threw him into the lake, where the water monsters made up for their previous disappointment. Biophile, convinced by his brother's arguments, watched sadly without intervention.

He had almost forgotten his mission in a disinterested concern for the welfare of his bat, of which he was very fond. As soon as he had seen the tower, he had been

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delighted at the opportunity of exercising his pet in suitable surroundings, and was now overjoyed when the priests contemptuously pushed him towards the tower. Once inside, he released the bat.

That animal had been accustomed to recover small objects for his friend, who would liberally reward him with more small insects than he could catch in a much longer flight. He now flew eagerly up the tower, easily eluding the wires with his supersonic radar and faultless aerial manoeuvres, found the ampoule, presented it to his master, and was duly rewarded with some flies the young man had thoughtfully provided. Biophile suddenly realised that he had attained the object of his quest.

Although not given to sociological reasoning, it now occurred to him that to inform the priests of his success might constitute a clumsy interference with the workings of a delicately balanced primitive culture. Impressed with the solemn duty bequeathed by a respected brother, he resorted this once to a pious fraud. He informed the priests that he had been reconnoitring, and would make the attempt next morning after a night of prayer and fasting. The priests, anticipating a second entertaining day, agreed and retired for the night.

When all was quiet, Biophile, accoutred as before, plunged into the lake with his pets and his ampoule. Crossing safely, he found the car unscathed. The natives, prone to projection, had avoided the vehicle in case it was booby-trapped.

Next morning, Biophile started the car and released his small squadron of bees for an airing. They flew straight for their hive, and guided him back to the space-port.

On the outskirts of the town, a familiar figure awaited him. His old father, hearing no news of the family, had raised money from friends and taken ship for the planet. He folded the young man in his arms, and listened eagerly for news. His regret at his double bereavement was substantially reduced by the sight of the ampoule, but he reflected that the perils of the enterprise were not over. Fortunately, he had with him a powerful narcotic, which he contrived to administer to his son in a cup of wine.

As the boy came round from the drug in the Co-ordinator's palace, his father congratulated himself on the part he had played. Thanks to his paternal devotion, the boy had been brought back without blowing up the liner or giving the ampoule to the first person who expressed a desire to examine it at leisure.

Since Biophile had a not unintelligent face, the Co-ordinator credited his achievement. With the blessing of the Eugenics Committee, his daughter's nuptials with Biophile were celebrated the next day. The young man did not forget his father, who was made Governor of the Planet.

The thoughtful reader, aware that a tale of this kind should end happily, may sense an incongruity. Was not

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Biophile due to succeed his father-in-law, and can this inspire confidence in the future of the system's industry and culture? The reader may set his mind at rest. The contents of the ampoule were just sufficient for the whole family, including the old Coordinator. To everyone's surprise, the rumours about the drug Hebe proved well founded, and the Coordinator enjoys his office to-day. Wealthy, respected, with a gifted wife to regulate his affairs, Biophile has founded the first Chair of Animal Behaviour in the system, and is himself the first—and, if Hebe keeps it up, the last—Professor.

# *The Atavists*

G. A. RYMER

(NOTE: This story was found among the literary remains of our respected colleague Rancliffe Northeast, the widely revered editor of *Babytalk World News*, who died on day 6, period 10, 2500, at the early age of 137, much lamented by the newspaper's five thousand million readers. In view of its factual basis the story is being given limited circulation to Intelligentsia, Grade 1, in the hope that it will stimulate discussion between those who cheerfully assert that the folksies can always be managed, and those who fear that, in the long run, they will prove as intractable as the insane certified for destruction.)

RECONSIDERING, after the event, I think we were rather hard on Jimmy Goofus. Certainly he deserved something for bringing back the intercontinental pat-ball championship, but to follow our revival of an ancient custom and award him a wife was, I am unhappily convinced, an error of policy. Here he was now, on the 82nd floor of Bigboys Cottage, pacing the room and wondering anxiously what to do next. He had just

returned at the end of his ten hours daily practice against a mechanical player that never missed a ball, and he was suddenly shocked to realise that he was getting no input. He could have got it himself, but he had what they called a wife, and he had been given to understand that she was supposed to do things for him. Why should he bother to switch on the input when that might be just the thing his wife was supposed to do? It was all very confusing. It made his head ache to feel no input going through. When he could stand it no longer he called out in a peevish falsetto: "Molly, Molly, why aren't you here when I want you? Molly!"

A young woman came in revealing the professional poise she had acquired as a nurse, before being selected as an award wife. "I am here, Jimmy," she said.

"It's about time! I've been ten minutes without any input. It's torture! Switch something on."

"Would you like the Fairy Folk, or Whimsy Willy's Wails?"

"No, Molly, I wouldn't. Give me the pleasure programme. I can have some pleasure, can't I?"

"Of course you can."

"Anybody would think you don't want me to have any pleasure, the way you act."

Molly ignored the remark and switched on our No. 9 programme. The screen wall lit up and the life-size juicycolour Can-Can Kickers danced on. Their theme song blared forth from the hidden chorus, supported by a hundred players in the jivyjazz orchestra:



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"We're happy, you're happy, everybody's happy now,  
You must smile, smile, smile;  
All the while, while, while,  
So wow, wow, wow, wow, wow!"

Goofus sat down to absorb the input, thankful that his ordeal was over, and Molly stood by, watching with a certain detached curiosity. But that night the input takers had a thrill which was certainly not planned by our somewhat unadventurous programme twisters. The dancers dissolved out and a leering simpleton occupied the screen.

"Hello, folksies," he bellowed, "this is your Nunky Joe, sound-sight-spreading from the Blah Blah Corporation. I am happy to interrupt the programme with some red-hot news. Hold tight to your seats, folksies, this is it: A strangler is loose! This very afternoon a monster named Platon Philogos escaped while serving a sentence of ten years oblivion for strangling his award wife. Isn't that something! Watch for him, folksies. This is his picture." Nunky Joe held up a photograph and moved it slowly about. "Try to remember it. Recognise—close your eyes—memorise. Recognise—close your eyes—memorise. Recognise—close your eyes—memorise." He went through the routine for several minutes in a happy chant that induced hypnotic concentration. "And now that you remember him, folksies, if you see him, turn him in. A reward of one million doodahs is offered for news of the strangling monster. I can't tell you his horrible secret motive; that's reserved for the *Babytalk*

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*World News* on day seven. Order your copy to-day. If you can't read you can put the paper through a visi-talk machine which will read it out to you. Well, folksies, that's enough for now: here come the Can-Can Kickers, so wow, wow, wow, wow, wow!"

This announcement—which, I thought, did great credit to our Nunky Joe—left Goofus dithering with excitement and terror, which, as it appeared, had a personal basis.

"I knew him," spluttered Goofus. "Yes, I knew him! He took some action pictures of me once: for studies in movement, he said. If only I could meet him now! A million doodahs for turning him in! That's a lot of doodahs that is, even if you do have to wait till Doodah Day to get it."

"You are not likely to meet him among ten thousand millions," said Molly, "so I shouldn't go out to look. Besides, by now the transport ways will be crowded with folksies searching for him, and you might get hurt in the crush."

"I suppose so," muttered Goofus, disappointed. "I wonder why he strangled her?"

"I heard a rumour. In the hospitals these rumours get about."

"What rumour?"

"That he had a fit of rage and went murdering mad because she refused to go to bed with him."

"How horrific! He ought to be atomised, I say!"

"He probably thought it was natural."

"But that sort of thing hasn't been done for hundreds

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of years. If nobody does it, he shouldn't do it. He should be total—like everybody. If he won't be total he ought to be atomised."

"I've heard they used to have babies that way."

"But that was in the Riddle Ages. We're organised now. We're total! And if you want babies there's the Artificial Insemination Centre, where they give you a thousand doodahs every time you go. And it's all synthetic now. So what more do you want?"

"Forget it, Jimmy, forget it. You must be hungry. I'll get you a meal."

Molly Megan was a competent person who, in my reconsidered opinion, was rather wasted in the ornamental role of an award wife. But our Organisation and Methods Department has classified the job as a sinecure and, consequently, things have to be made easy for her. Although Bigboys Cottage was not in the same class as our latest prefabricated starscrapers it was quite conveniently appointed, and Molly was well satisfied with her kitchen. All she had to do to prepare a meal was to turn on the tap, and a ration of Magicpap poured out piping hot from the synthetic food factory. This was a great concession when you remember that most of the folksies still have to fetch the stuff from the factories in pails.

Molly took a meal in to Goofus, who was still watching the screen and wondering why he couldn't think of a way to meet Philogos—the man who was causing us all so much trouble. We owed a great deal to this brilliant colleague of ours, and it was painful to find him acting

with such unpardonable nontotality. It was Platon Philogos who thought up the word 'Magicpap', which did so much to popularise that gooey sludge; he invented 'Babytalk', the universal language of the folksies; and, at a crisis, he showed us how to use the word 'peacewar' in a way that justified the atomisation of a few odd millions who refused to eat some of the less successful of our experiments in manufacturing artificial food.

His reputation rests secure on his classic work 'Futurism: Key to the Pinhead Sculptures', which throws a light on that mysterious age the twentieth century. For a generation our scientists had been puzzled by certain grotesque sculptures found while excavating the site of a ruined village once known as London. These damaged effigies, which have been restored as three standing figures, had huge bodies and small heads which were out of all proportion. No human remains of similar types have ever been found, and the mystery of the pin-head sculptures was a constant challenge to our thinkers. They were faced with the difficulty that from the twentieth to the twenty-third century the world had been destroyed so often that no continuous record of civilisation could be preserved. But Philogos, browsing in the library of our Central Museum of Relics, found a clue. In a lucky moment—and all researchers need luck—he picked up a grey-backed booklet, with its pages covered in transparent preservative, and found himself reading the Galton Lecture delivered before the Eugenics Society in 1906. Its theme was the trend of

national intelligence, and its general conclusion, expressed in the discussion on the author's paper, was that the average intelligence was declining by about two points a generation, and that "the rate of decline, if maintained for fifty years, would roughly double the number of feeble-minded children and halve the number of pupils of 'scholarship' ability". And, as Philogos argued, if you stretched that fifty years to five hundred you would get something like the semi-imbeciles we have been deliberately breeding to man our superproduction factories. It was known that a style of art called 'futurism' was then in fashion, and Philogos deduced that the pinhead sculptures were a futuristic attempt to predict the type of humanity that would eventually emerge from the society then existing.

It is with great personal regret I put on record the fact that we awarded Platon Philogos a wife in a spirit of levity. The Award Group was unable to think of any mark of distinction appropriate to his unusual services, and the idea of an award wife, which still seems amusing to some of us, was seized on as a way out of the difficulty. In the light of what has happened I shall urge strongly at the next Total Assembly that this meaningless relic of an ancient and barbarous practice should be abolished, and that no wives of any kind shall be recognised in the Total Scientific World State.

When Molly Megan returned to her kitchen she was surprised to find a stranger lounging against the door.

"How did you get in?"

"Passkey. One I made with a piece of bent wire."

"Why didn't you ring and ask?"

"You might have said No. Is Jimmy Goofus in?"

"Yes. But who are you? . . . I know . . . You are Philogos!"

"That's right. And you, I suppose, are Jimmy's award wife."

"Yes. I'm Molly Megan. Shall I tell Jimmy you are here?"

"Don't bother. You'll do instead. I had to come here. Goofus is the only man I know in this area. And I am, as you might say, a little hard-pressed. Not frightened, are you?"

"You don't look very frightening."

"Thank you. In a dim light you'll notice that I look almost handsome. As a matter of fact I'm just a harmless professor who got on the wrong side of a clique who played a joke on him. But it's no joke now. I got ten years oblivion as a start, while the prosecution prepared its case."

"How did you escape?"

"They made a mistake. One period they underestimated the amount of the drug needed to keep me in the sleep-working state. I came to before the next injection was due, and it was easy to scheme a way out."

"I thought escape was impossible."

"Not for Platon Philogos! The warders were all folksies, and I knew that if I told them I was a government agent they wouldn't believe me; if I told them I was spying on the sleep-workers they wouldn't believe me; but if I told them in one sentence that I was a

government agent spying on the sleep-workers they would have to believe me, because the last part of the sentence is the logical action of the first: and it never occurs to folksies that while the words may be logical they may not be related to the facts."

"And it worked?"

"They opened ~~wide~~ the gates, put down the velvet carpet, and bowed me out."

Philogos threw up his hands in a gesture to indicate how easy it was, and sat himself down at the kitchen table.

"The trouble is, Molly, I have to eat. That's why I came here. If it isn't disturbing you too much, could you get me a little something?"

Molly did not answer. She was thinking out the implications of her position. "You must have been seen coming here," she said, "you must have been seen."

"Of course I was; a dozen times."

"Then they'll follow up for the reward."

"Not a bit of it. When I was stopped I told them I was a remembrancer sent out by the government to remind them what Philogos looked like. I gave them the routine, 'Recognise—close your eyes—memorise'. And they said 'Thank you', and went away searching for me."

"Do you really think you're safe?"

"Reasonably so. But if they do catch me it will be serious. I shall get a hundred years oblivion without the option of a painless death."

To Molly the position looked desperate, but the philo-

sophic calm with which Philogos met the situation was peculiarly soothing. She began to sympathise with a man who could take his troubles so lightly. "I can get you some Magicpap," she said.

"Not that stuff, please! Haven't you some real food?"

"You know there isn't enough real food for more than ten per cent of the population!"

"Certainly I know: but then, I've always been one of the ten per cent. Goofus is a bigboy, he's a champ: he must have something special."

"He has some training"food for special occasions."

"That sounds better; what may it be?"

"Tinned gammon rashers in tomato sauce."

Even Philogos seemed stunned, but he was remembering that we once had a glut of tomatoes and bacon. It wasn't policy to let the folksies acquire a taste for it, so, on a suggestion from the Sports Ministry it was made up into a training food. We all thought it rather sporting of the Sports Ministry to help us out.

"I'll try it," said Philogos, "if you have nothing else."

"I'll hot it up. It won't take a minute under the rays."

"If you have some bread I'd like a couple of slices. I won't ask for butter."

"Bread? I've never seen bread. That's made from real wheat, isn't it?"

"More or less. But never mind."

Molly hesitated, looked round as if afraid of some invisible eye, walked over to Philogos, bent down close to him and whispered in his ear, "I've got a few biscuits I took from the hospital."



## THE ATAVISTS

"Wonderful! You are a brave woman, Molly, a brave woman. We'll dunk the biscuits in the tomato sauce and really enjoy ourselves."

Molly laid the table for two and served helpings for herself and Philogos. "I know it's a crime to eat real food without a permit," she said, "but somehow you make me feel I can get away with it. I wonder what it tastes like?"

"It wasn't intended for epicures," said Philogos, "and if you don't like it you can always shut your eyes, hold your nose, and pretend that it's medicine."

"It's wonderful," said Molly, "wonderful!"

"It arouses my sense of wonder, too! By the way, how do you get along with Goofus?"

"He doesn't seem to have much time for me. For ten hours a day he listens in—because he can't look while he's practising—then for six hours he looks and listens. Wouldn't you say that was too much input for anybody?"

"What I should say would blast the screens off all the walls in New Megapolis! So you don't find him very interesting?"

"Not very. I don't believe he'd notice any difference if I wasn't here."

"I know the type: dead from the neck up and down. Why don't you ask for a transfer?"

"The administration wouldn't like it. They wouldn't help. I've got a black mark against me—I'm classed 'N.R.' "

" 'Not Reproducible', eh?"

"That's it. They said I showed signs of independence when I objected to being used as a reséarch animal."

Philogos found himself approving more and more of Molly. Any woman who could stand up to the authorities that much was a woman after his own heart.

"I'm beginning to like you, Molly," he said, "it seems to me we're both in much the same sort of a mess. I've got to get away, and you want to get away. Don't you think we might join forces?"

Molly paused and looked at him, with the last piece of gammon rasher poised on the fork half-way to her mouth. Philogos was a lean, clean-shaven man who looked very mature to a woman well under thirty. He had a humorous manner which suggested that he didn't care overmuch what happened to him; an easy manner that put you on good terms with him; the manner of a man who had spent as much time with books as with people; a man who would never really grow out of his student days, and so, a man who was a little untidy. Molly had an overpowering impulse to get up and stroke back his untidy hair. "How do you mean, 'join forces'?" she said.

"Go away together. I know a place in the ancient uplands of Tibet where they'll never find us. A place where we can find real food, and real people."

"How can we get there?"

"I grabbed an air scooter on the way here. It's parked on the roof. We can be away as soon as you say Go."

Molly passed her hand caressingly through his hair:

## THE ATAVISTS

"I haven't forgotten what you did to your first wife," she mused.

"No?" said Philogos. "Then I swear by the beards of all the forgotten prophets that if you act in the same way I'll do the same to you!"

"It won't be necessary," said Molly.

And presently, feeling the thrill of a shared adventure, the atavists went out and up together into the star-lit sky.

# *The Mission*

ARTHUR SELLINGS

FOR a century so calamitous, the twentieth fathered a surprising number of things, monumental and trivial, that long outlived it. This windy corner of the metropolis was one of them.

Buildings round about it flickered and died. Costumes of the people who frequented it changed in their seasons. As for those who spoke there, the only unchanging thing about *them* was their burning indignation at the state of the world; that and each one's complete conviction that he alone knew the cure.

On week-ends and the old holidays, as well as on the by now firmly established National Strike days, the crowds gathered to listen, as crowds had gathered for centuries. But now the speakers spoke of different things. A young man, tonsured artist-wise, pleaded for Numeralism, the way of pure number. An advocate of the Third Church of Jung successfully out-voiced a robot who was speaking cogently, but monotonously, on behalf of that newest of depressed classes. And in one corner an old man mounted a rickety platform whose message was all but illegible in the antique half-darkness. . . .

## THE MISSION

The old man looked down at his wife for an instant. She nodded, smiling slightly. He lifted his chin and cleared his throat. "The day of deliverance is at hand," he announced. But his quavering words were lost in a gust of laughter from the crowd listening to the next-door speaker. He tried again.

"The great day is coming, friends. I tell you, be prepared. The prophets gave their message in indisputable terms. They will not repeat it to this pleasure-seeking generation. No, friends, when the great day comes, only those who are ready will be able to go. They alone will pass to the golden worlds up there——"

One face was looking up now, blank and white in the half-light. Seeing it, the speaker brandished a hand aloft, rejoicing that his years should add a shaking eloquence to the gesture. "Yes, friend, the golden worlds the old stories tell of. Make no mistake, they're up there, waiting for the faithful."

"Ain't no up," said the face. "Up, down, ain't such in space. Everything's all around out there."

"Ah," said the old man, smiling. "A man of logic. Try digging down for them then, my friend."

A single snigger came up. The audience had doubled. Amply now the speaker continued, ready to explain the Word.

"Certainly, there is no up or down there. But from here to the golden worlds the way is upwards."

"There ain't such," the face persisted. "It's all dark and dead."

"Hah! You hear that, friends? All is dark to them

that won't see. All is dead to them that won't live. *Dead? Dark? Is the sun dead, the sun dark?*"

"Go away, who you tryin' to fox? No one can live on the sun. It's too hot."

"Ah, but who said anything about living *on* the sun? None of the old books say anything about that. But notice, friends, the contradiction. First he says it's too dark; now it's too bright for him."

"Too *hot*, I said," said the heckler, aggrieved. Two people laughed now.

"Critics of the Word always make it too hot for themselves," said the speaker, leaning easily on the edge of his rostrum. Three people laughed at that. Attracted by the sound, others came drifting from the fringes of neighbouring audiences.

The old man felt suddenly excited. Was this going to be *the* night, the night of affirmation, not of one or two, but of a whole joyous crew? A crew to march boldly out of the park gates to the ship, singing, eyes shining—and he and Martha at their head. He began to tremble at the thought, and had to straighten quickly for fear of losing balance.

"Yes, my friends, the critics are all confounded in face of the grand and glorious truth. And the truth is that mankind was not destined for this world alone. This is only the first stage, the chrysalis. Any day now the faithful are going to spread their wings, just as the prophets of old did——"

"They spread their wings all right," someone interrupted.

"Me, I'd rather be alive," said someone else. "I like my—what did he call it?"

"*Alive?*" the old man said caustically. "You don't call yourself alive, do you? No more than one of those robots is alive. Why, it's getting so that twenty years from now no one will be able to tell the difference between a robot and a man."

There was laughter, and renewed laughter as the heckler said, "You don't have to worry. You won't be here in twenty years' time."

"No, friend, I shan't. By then I shall be up there. I shall have gone to join the prophets."

Somebody started singing, "*We shall meet by and by—*"

A dry, precise voice said, "But they never got there. They never got anywhere. They crashed or blew up."

"Ah, my friend, you refer to the martyrs, the glorious martyrs. Their names are enshrined for ever. But not all were martyrs, remember that. There were those who succeeded, who went on."

The precise voice was pitying. "And they never came back. Because they got lost. They went into orbits. All those prophets of yours are just circling round the earth in so many coffins."

The speaker spread his hands in eloquent sorrow.

"Oh, the voice of this faithless generation! You forget that we have had messages from them."

"Messages? What messages? Where are they?"

"*Where are they?* he says! How do you think they came? All printed in black and white on square sheets

of paper? No, sir, the faithful have *heard*. Messages have been received by radio from up there——”

The owner of the precise voice snorted. “It’s radio now, is it? It used to be spirit voices or knocking on tables. There have always been people like you, imposing on other people’s credulity. They all claimed they heard messages. But ask them for proof and——”

The rest of his words were drowned in protests from the rest of the crowd, a sizeable one by now. Once the old man would have recognised such protests as merely a sign of their impatience to start heckling on another tack. But now, after years of starved hope, he dared clutch at it as a token of support.

“Thank you, friends. But let us not be too hard on the unbeliever. Our case does not rest on that testimony alone. Let me repeat it, as I have done here for many years now.

“We believe that man *did* conquer space as the first prophets foretold. We believe that all men might have taken the same glorious path, had not earthly and temporal powers conspired to prevent it——”

“Nobody conspired to prevent it,” the precise voice interrupted again, almost angrily now. “I have studied the history of it and——” But again his words were drowned by protests and catcalls.

“Thank you, thank you.” The speaker lifted his hand benignly. “The truth is that earthly powers were frightened at men’s eyes being on the worlds beyond. Because they knew they could have no power over men who were free—truly free.”



"What's this?" another voice cut in, a burly man's voice. "A political party?"

There were hoots of laughter at that. The word *political* had accreted overtones with the centuries, overtones of comicality, futility, a certain obscenity even.

"No, sir," said the old man. "This is a visionary party. This is the stronghold of those who have kept faith. This is——" he pointed downwards to the faded legend on the board—"the Space Mission."

"But what's your programme?" came a voice from the back of the crowd.

"Ah, my friend, a good question. We believe in the words and deeds of the prophets. We believe in the First Law of Motion——"

"But what are you going to *do*?"

"Yes, what are you going to do?" came other voices in a chorus. The precise voice said, "Mumbo-jumbo. Mumbo-jumbo."

"I've told you," the old man said patiently. "The believers will gather together and fly up to join the prophets and the children of the prophets in the wonderful worlds."

"You mean—in a space-ship?" said a young man standing at the foot of the platform, looking up with eyes round and shining in the darkness.

"Indeed, son, the ships of the faithful, here and in other strongholds of the Faith scattered through the world."

"You mean—you've got a ship?"

"Why, of course," said the old man, hoping, praying.

## THE MISSION

Was this a convert? He looked the right kind of lad. Tall, straight, clear-eyed.

"Have you *seen* it?" said someone.

"A *ship*, he calls it!"

The young man pressed closer in his excitement. "Then, it's all ready to go?"

"Yeah, on the scrapheap, that's where it's ready to go," someone called out. The old man's words were lost in the uproar that followed. He lifted his head, waiting for silence. When it came at last he said:

"It's a good ship, lad. Built by the prophet Rosenkraft in 2180. In the same model he reached Mars."

There were jeers at that, but the young man seemed not to hear them. "Then, if I join you—we can take off? *To-night?*"

*Why are they always so impatient?* the old man thought sadly. "No, son," he said. "It's not so easy as that. First must come training—the attainment of discipline, mental, physical and spiritual."

"I'm ready for that," the young man said eagerly. "I can see that such a great flight will mean training. But I'm ready."

"Ready?" said the speaker, as oblivious as the young man to the derision of the others. "Ready to leave your home, ready to go out and preach the Cause, enlisting support and offerings for it?"

The young man's eyes were puzzled now. "But I don't want to go preaching or begging. I want to fly up there, the same as you said. That's what you want, isn't it? You want members for your crew?"

## THE MISSION

"Indeed. But first we must gather supplies. And fuel."

"*Hah!*" said the precise voice, triumphantly now. "And where are you going to get fuel? The Government controls all raw materials. And they won't let anyone have fuel for space attempts, because of the senseless loss of life, and because everybody knows now that space-travel is impossible. That's why there haven't been any attempts for over two hundred years now."

"They'll sell it to us," the old man said desperately. "I tell you——"

But the crowd had already started to drift away, having had their fill of laughing at a silly old man who could make such myths out of failure and broken dreams.

"It's just as I said," the old man called out. "It's persecution of the faithful by the powers-that-be. But they'll have to bow to the greater power of the Word. They——"

But the crowd had gone by now, gone to attach themselves to other crowds, to laugh at other speakers, other creeds. Only the young man remained, staring dully up at the old man.

The old man spoke urgently, beseechingly. "We'll do it, son. Faith will do it. We have the Word."

But the young man looked suddenly angry. "The *Word!* It's all words, all of it. And I thought——" He broke off, as if not trusting himself to continue. Abruptly he turned on his heel and strode away.

"But there's more to it," the old man called after him.

"There's——" But the young man was lost now in the darkness and the crowds.

"He'll come back," the old man's wife said.

"Yes, he'll come back." The old man's voice was bitter. "They always come back to laugh and mock." He looked up, through the bare twisted branches of the trees overhead. The heavens shone with a winter brightness, crystal-cold. The stars were only glittering specks in all that black loneliness. Only the moon was round and real—and the moon was dead. Even the faithful recognised that. 'Was it any wonder that people refused to believe?

A wind had sprung up. It cut through his threadbare tunic. He shivered. But he squared his shoulders resolutely and framed his lips to speak again. For a moment, gripping the rostrum, he looked out over the noisy crowds, then he sighed heavily and dismounted. Without saying a word he folded up the stand. He beckoned to his wife, and carrying the stand between them the old couple passed through the ancient gates.

They had to stop several times on the way home to rest from their burden, but the old man remained silent. And his wife did not intrude upon his sadness.

They came in sight of their mission home. In the shadow of the starward-pointing spire he laid the stand down, and looked up at the shining shape.

"It looks rusty," he said.

"No, it's not," his wife said. "It's just a trick of the moonlight. It's still a fine ship, Tom. It's like the words of the prophets who built it; it can never rust."

He said suddenly, flatly, "I don't think *we* shall ever fly in it."

"Tom!"

He turned his face away. "Oh, I'm not losing faith, Martha. I know we're chosen. But say——" he turned back—"say we're only chosen to be martyrs, like the old ones? Not gloriously in flight, though, but only here on Earth, martyred on people's scorn and disbelief?"

She put her hand over his. "We're spreading the Word, Tom. We shan't be passed over."

"But, Martha, we're old now. All the converts we ever made have fallen by the wayside. We're no nearer now than when we started all those years ago. Say the great day doesn't come in our time?"

She placed a finger on his lips. "Come along," she said, lifting up her end of the stand. Sadly, wearily, he took up his, and they entered the rocket.

They laid down their burden. She took him by the hand and led him to a cushioned acceleration couch. "Here. You're tired, Tom."

He only picked fretfully at the shabby cushions, holding up a loose thread in his thin fingers.

"I'll stitch it, dear," she said quickly. "First thing in the morning."

He made no answer. His hands dropped slackly.

"The prophets won't abandon us, Tom. Even if we never get the fuel, they'll know that we tried. They're watching over us from up there. Up there they've built new ships, great ships for the succouring of the faithful. They'll come down—Rosenkraft, Hurst, all the pro-

phets." Her eyes went to the sacred relics that hung upon the walls; the scrap of rocket tube, the charred fragment of a martyr's log. "They'll take us back up there with them, just as you always said they would."

He lifted his head, making a wan attempt at a smile. "I wish my faith were as strong as yours, Martha."

She looked gently upon him. "Mine is only strong because you shared so much of yours with me."

He sighed. "Oh, if only we'd been born in the great days when the prophets were building their ships. When people couldn't mock it or deny it, because it was *real*."

"But it's still real, Tom."

"How could people ever forget?" he said. "Once they had seen the prophets go forth how could they go back again to their ordinary tasks and forget all about it?"

"But the faithful didn't forget," she said. "We've kept it alive and real all these years. And, Tom, it *is* real. Who knows, perhaps they're starting out this very moment on the journey back."

He straightened suddenly. "Why, that's right! I've always thought that—well, that they'd be *there* one moment and *here* the next. But no, even for them in their great ships it will take *some* time, won't it? Perhaps——" he jerked a hand in the air—"perhaps *then* they took off, and they're on their way, their ships all shining, their rockets flaming and thundering."

"That's right, Tom," the old woman said, her eyes bright. "Oh, Tom, tell me, tell me again how it's going to be. They'll drop to Earth as gently as birds——"

"Well, all right, let me tell it, then," he said, as if

annoyed. But she could see that that was only feigned, and she waited expectantly, her hands clasped beneath her chin.

"Well," he said, "they'll drop to Earth, those mighty ships, as gently as birds alighting. And the Great Ones will step forth, young again and young for ever, reborn in the golden worlds——"

"Yes, Tom, yes?" she breathed excitedly.

"And they'll make the faithful new again just like themselves. And we'll mount up into the skies with them, into the Regions of Free-Fall. We'll be free, free from age and gravity and the burden of the flesh. On and on we'll journey, from one wonderful new world to another, on and on, for ever and ever. . . ."

# *Alpha In Omega*

JONATHAN STONES

THE night-watch Vigilator completed the log entry and gave the long bank of instruments a keen scrutiny. He nodded, satisfied. A.G.P.U.—the fabulous epitome of mankind's ingenuity, the Automatic Generator of Power Unlimited—was running sweetly, sealed deep in the mountain beneath him.

Jon Hallan re-read the log entry.

*"July 7th 2500.*

*0100 hrs. Generator 147 replaced."*

He visualised the sequence in the entirely automatic process: the fabricator drawing material and producing another complete generator, passing it to the dispensers, coupling up and dissociating the defective component in the subsidiary reactor. So simple, he thought. Hallan was a young man, proud of his responsibility and knowledge.

A plate glowed by his side. He turned handsome clean-cut features towards the communicator.

"Hey, Jon. What are you doing?"



The Controller of Power Distribution wore a quizzical expression. "Stop stoking, can't you?"

"A.G.P.U. changed a generator," Hallan said, glancing at the Output indicator. "Meeting load now. Nothing to worry about." His natural dignity carried a comforting assurance.

"Worry?" The Controller nearly choked. "What's A.G.P.U. playing at?"

Hallan frowned, his ingrained faith in the infallibility of the vast power station resenting the insinuation.

"Cut out the pique, Jon," snapped the other, "we cannot handle it. Feeding it everywhere we can reach—all they can take. Beaming twice normal load through Interplanetary."

"Some mistake, Mike. You've a hidden demand somewhere. A.G.P.U. is meeting it, that's all."

"How much is she giving?"

Hallan told him, adding that A.G.P.U. was not human, she did not make mistakes. The cynicism went unheeded. The Controller was busy with calculations.

"But that's eight per cent above demand."

The figure startled Hallan. Unprecedented, it was also dangerously high. Mildly anxious because he had failed to notice it, he scanned the record charts. His reading tallied, but not with Power Distribution.

"Must be bogus impulses," he muttered. "Selecting Over-ride."

Nothing happened.

For a moment he glared at the controls, suddenly confused and reluctant to pass the responsibility higher. But

there were inflexible regulations established by International Law. They left him no choice. He contacted both the Director and Fil Steel, the Senior Engineer, reporting the situation.

"Locate that bogus demand. We're coming in."

The Director cut the connection crisply.

During the next few minutes Hallan's anxiety mounted as his bewilderment grew. The discrepancy was bad, but what was far worse—he could not override the automatic governor deep inside A.G.P.U.

The dynamism of the stocky Director contrasted oddly with the deceptively casual gait of Steel as they entered.

"Found it?"

"It's fictitious, sir. And steadily growing."

"How far did you trace?"

"As far as I could," Hallan said.

"And . . . ?"

"Absolutely nothing. She's out of control."

The Director favoured him with a withering look and flung off his tunic. Without a word Steel had gone behind the control console and was ripping off panels. The Director followed. To Hallan the room had become insufferably stuffy.

"We dig," Steel grunted. "In here somewhere."

For twenty minutes the three men toiled at the task of locating the fault. At last, the Director called a halt.

"Not here," he said wearily and his eyes were peculiarly bleak. Hallan hardly recognised him.

"You mean . . ." Steel sounded unwilling to speak even the word. ". . . inside?"

The Director did not reply. He had turned away, his back stiff and his knuckles white. They watched his silent struggle with growing alarm.

"A.G.P.U. will close down." The words came slowly as from a great distance.

"Great heavens, man," exploded Steel, "you can't. With half the planet dependent upon A.G.P.U., you can't just pull out the plug when you like. You'd kill a million at least. Think of all those asleep in their air-conditioned sleepsacks; those in the Antarctic mines. The sea farms flooding, the tides loose again and the Interplanetary beam cut off. There's no end to the disaster. Put human nature to work behind that and you'll brew panic by dawn and chaos by noon."

"It's no use terrifying me, Fil, and politely calling me killer. You'll not change facts."

The Director still stared into the night. He had become distant, disturbingly calm. And when he faced them they saw the ravages of that struggle within him.

"There is no alternative," he said. "We cannot afford the luxury of hope, not when the reaction is within reach of the Threshold. Once past Intolerance and you might as well . . ." He made a gesture of hopelessness. "This is Emergency ONE. Jon, action that. I want every atomic generator reactivated. They've sixty minutes. All I can give them."

The orders went out and silence brooded over the control-room.

Thoughts, wisely unspoken, assailed Hallan. At this rate of increase the power in excess of the load would mount within the hour to little short of the safety limit. Beyond that . . . His skin crawled. His understanding of Bengtsson's equation of mass intolerance told him the equilibrium between the drive from the reactor and the generator load could be disturbed only so far. Beyond that lay the Threshold of Intolerance. Even Bengtsson, that fabulous Swede, who had conceived, designed and built A.G.P.U., could not be precise. Laboratory tests were impossible, since the reaction could only be initiated on a vast scale, yet they knew that once past the Threshold there was no controlling the reaction. The enormous force of the drive would erupt into heat energy and within a millisecond A.G.P.U. and several thousand cubic miles of rock would blaze upward like a miniature sun. The island site, far from the mainland, was significant. Nor had Bengtsson under-estimated the problem. Human control and maintenance were impossible, not because of radiation, but the speed and degree of co-ordination necessary were far beyond human capabilities. The Master Control Governor supported by eight square miles of automatic factory, watched over the monster, tamed its fierce power and made A.G.P.U. virtually independent of its creators.

Until something inexplicable happened. Even now Hallan refused to believe in anything but a simple explanation.

Time dragged lame-footed.

For some minutes the Director had been punching figures into a computer. The clicking filled the room with uneasy sound. It stopped and a card fell into the tray. He spun around glancing at the clock. Hallan saw the expression in his eyes and something cold touched his heart.

"Can't give them the hour, Jon. Only thirty minutes. At exactly 0200 we cut A.G.P.U. Inform Power Distribution."

The reception at the other end of the communicator was shocking. Hallan avoided the furious yet beseeching face before him. It was obvious he had no idea what was happening in A.G.P.U. control. Hallan dared not tell him—yet.

The Director was motioning Hallan aside.

"Mike," he said. "This is Emergency ONE PLUS. Rate of power increase has doubled. We'll be on the Threshold inside another thirty minutes. I'm closing down."

With eyes on the clock he leaned across the button-studded console, his hand hovering above a red knob. Hesitantly, almost caressingly his fingers touched it, reluctant perhaps to kill the fierce life within A.G.P.U.

"Now," he said sharply and pressed the knob.

The needle never even flickered in its slow upward movement. Someone was breathing heavily, a snatch in the sound.

"Do it again. Didn't work," urged Steel in a strained voice. Mechanically he obeyed.

There was no response.

"Delayed action," muttered the Director. "Master Control taking time to reverse impulses."

The seconds spun out.

"Not that long." It was Steel, his leathery face flushed. "Should have obeyed by now." He was glaring at the power indicator. Suddenly he leaned over and smashed his fist upon the red button.

"Cut. Damn you."

For several shocked seconds they watched for some response.

"We've lost control," cried Hallan unsteadily. "She's got away . . . blast herself and everyone . . ."

"Not yet," corrected the Director, facing the communicator. "Mike. You heard. Put back on A.G.P.U. all the load you can raise. We may yet be able to avert disaster."

"How long?" Steel was already tearing off his uniform as he strode across the room.

"Not more than thirty minutes."

"Might be enough." He was wrenching open lockers and dragging out protective clothing. "Jon, load the trolley. I'm going down to see."

They had broken the seals, opened the massive door and were inside the air lock garbed in the cumbersome radiation suits within fifteen minutes. Steel's words still rang in Hallan's ears. 'Martyrs don't live long', but the glance exchanged between the elder men more than rewarded his impulse to enter A.G.P.U. with Steel.

His companion moved rapidly into the upper level

with a brief "Bring the trolley," over the intercom. The journey down the sloping ramps connecting the levels fascinated Hallan; vistas of dull, gleaming machines and control gear apparently stretching to the limit of vision filled him with awed wonder. It was so much bigger than he had imagined from the ten years of studying the plans in the control-room.

On the third level he entered the hall of the giant fabricators, each half a mile long. The sight of myriad moving parts effortlessly creating a huge generator in one continuous operation thrilled him. It was only when he saw the weirdly complex dispensers couple up three new generators simultaneously that he grasped the significance. A.G.P.U. was not just replacing worn out equipment, she was adding to the generating capacity—steadily and inexorably.

He caught up with Steel in the power output area.

"Nothing wrong here," he reported to the Director. "Proceeding to seventh level—Master Control Governor."

Hallan followed, dragging the trolley and already conscious of the effort required to move rapidly in the heavy clothing. On the sixth level he paused to change hands. He was standing beside a slurry de-activating tank, disengaging the manipulator and clipping on the other claw, when a movement on the edge of vision in his viewing plate made him turn.

A thin vapour coiled up from the tank, glowing spasmodically with electric discharges. The effect was confusing and eerie. Something had moved in there:

something white and long had just scuttered across the veiled surface. Rather like a snake, he thought. But that was sheer fancy: nothing could live in this radiation for long, not even he. He squinted through the murk above the slowly churning semi-liquid, trying to persuade himself he had imagined it. This was an awful place, preyed on the nerves, made him see things. Or was the radiation responsible? Transmuting his brain tissue? He knew of cases. Would account for his tiredness. Sweat began to trickle coldly down his back.

Close by, the slurry quivered, heaved and pouted. A great bubble blossomed and burst in a glutinous spatter. He grimaced in relief. Of course. He should have known that the discharges were igniting the methane as it was liberated from the slurry.

"Jon. Quickly." Steel's voice was sharp, urgent. "It's gone all white—oh no . . . NO."

There was a click and silence.

"What happened?"

"Don't know, sir. He's not in sight."

Hallan was running, the trolley jerking behind him, making for the heart of A.G.P.U.—the Master Control Governor.

He fell over Steel just inside the enclosure. He was sprawled alongside the wall. Hallan touched helmets, listening intently. He showed symptoms of extreme shock, but was breathing. That conformed with his last message, suggesting as it did first surprise and then horror. Hallan glanced up at the black enigmatic mass of M.C.G. and wondered what was 'all white'. Judging



by the dent in the back of Steel's helmet he seemed to have been flung backwards about fifteen feet.

Puzzled, Hallan made his report, adding:

"Nothing near him. Must have been removing the panel over Master Tape section when . . ."

"Leave him. Change those tapes. But first cut in the televiewer. Let me see."

Hallan complied, casting apprehensive glances towards the dark recess partly uncovered. Cautiously he approached M.C.G. keeping within the Director's line of sight. Steel, he reasoned, was no fool, never took liberties with mechanisms, so whatever struck him down would be unexpected. He was not enjoying this at all.

"All right. Get that panel off."

The Director's voice crackled in his ear. Hallan would have liked to determine precisely why Steel lay by the entrance, before exposing himself to the same risk.

"Move, Jon. Move. We've less than five minutes to the Threshold."

Caution withered in hot urgency. For a moment Hallan eyed the panel Steel had partially moved, then resolutely snapped his manipulators fast and pulled.

There seemed to be no interval between that movement and lying amid the wreckage of the trolley. Absurdly foreshortened there had been an impression of a whitish shape lashing out at him.

Half-stunned and trembling he staggered up, blind terror jostling his senses. Something inside that cavity had coiled out and repulsed him as it had struck Steel.

A.G.P.U. had actually denied him access to its innermost heart. It was preposterous—A.G.P.U. was a machine, not sentient.

“For God’s sake, man, what are you doing?”

Slowly the words penetrated Hallan’s mental chaos. He gulped.

“It . . . it hit me. White thing came out . . . knocked down like Steel.”

“Talk sense, boy.”

“It’s alive.” He realised he was incoherent, but words were pitifully inadequate.

“Nonsense. It can’t be. Pull yourself together.”

“I tell you it refuses. Got a will of its own. It’s fighting back.”

There was a shocked silence made more pregnant by its attenuation.

“I’m coming down,” announced the Director.

“You’ll never get here—no time left.”

He digested that with a grunt. After a pause.

“Can you cope—alone?”

“I’ll have to.”

“You’ve three minutes.”

Hallan’s fright was subsiding, giving place to that calm beyond fear where desperation dwells.

“Approaching,” he reported. “Three feet away. Using flashlamp. Control drum white. Misshapen. Sort of bloated.” He was reaching cautiously inside to touch it when the drum erupted. A thick white thing whipped outward striking his manipulator and sending pain stabbing up his arm. But this time he saw what struck

him. A long rubbery horror, several inches thick coiling back upon the drum.

He was trying to describe it when his legs were snatched from under him. The next instant he was struggling on the floor with something very strong which he could not see. It released his legs and started coiling around his chest, beating violently against his helmet. Suddenly a reddish, flat head with probing antennæ swam into his vision. But it was the trumpet-shaped mouth, sucking toothlessly at him, which appalled. He could see right into its blood-red gullet.

Hallan let out a shriek and tore at the loathsome thing. It felt rubbery and slimy.

"Get it off me," he yelled. Then remembered he was alone with it. Mutely he fought. He could feel his strength ebbing in time with the roaring of blood behind his ears. He knew he was suffocating; knew the coils about his body cut off his air supply; knew this was unreal, impossibly mad to be fighting with a prehistoric marine creature a thousand times full size.

Out of the mists of approaching unconsciousness came the words, "Manipulators—the hooks, Jon—the hooks."

With a supreme effort he rallied, released his protective embrace, suffered a cruel blow and slashed scissorwise with his manipulators. The hooks bit deep. Almost at once he was free and struggling to his feet. Shaking uncontrollably he looked down at the repulsive enormity writhing on the floor. The sight filled him with a strange and terrible anger. The thing was in-

decent, yet wonderful beyond all telling. He knew what it was now and all fear had gone.

Lurching over to M.C.G. he rapped on the metal and slashed at the livid white tail coiling out. The hook caught fast. The next instant he was head foremost inside the cavity grappling frantically with the creature and with the control tape trapping its head. It put up a tremendous fight but he released it.

"All this trouble for an Annelid." His voice sobbed with exertion as he flailed the enormous flatworm against the floor. "Pre-Cambrian in the twenty-sixth century, eh. You horror. And . . . breeding in our tanks."

A familiar voice spoke patiently:

"When you have finished, Jon, just change those tapes. We've less than a minute to live."

Hallan flung off the Annelid, leaped at M.C.G. and tore out the damaged master control tapes. Unexpectedly he found Steel beside him, still dazed but handing up the replacements in the correct order. Hallan threaded them into the impulse head and snapped down the contact.

"Replacement effected."

These were the worst moments of all. He could feel the clammy coldness of his garments against his skin and fresh beads prickling out all over him. There was no time left to try anything else. If the tapes were not the remedy, the A.G.P.U. was doomed. He wondered if he would see the flash.

"Came from the tanks, you said?" a voice murmured.

Hallan, keyed up with suspense, rounded on Steel, but found his companion no less outraged.

"Primordial earth state, I imagine." It was the Director, musing aloud. Steel shrugged and cast his eyes heavenwards. "Warm radio-active mud, methane and ammonia, static discharges, all perfect for promoting life synthesis."

"What did you say?" gasped Hallan.

"Could be. No, I'm not crazy, Fil. The televiewer stood up to all Jon's depredations and I witnessed that magnificent struggle with a living nightmare. You have my unqualified esteem, Jon."

"But, sir . . . the time?"

"Pre-Cambrian you said. Very likely. If A.G.P.U., the omega of mankind's achievement has given us Sun waste, the tanks provided the environment, then we have created alpha."

"What are you talking about?" expostulated Steel angrily. "Haven't we passed the Threshold?"

"We have made Life, my dear Fil. I'm coming down to have a closer look myself."

"But the Threshold?" they shouted.

"Stop worrying. Everything is under control. Oh . . . and congratulations to you both."

# *The Blond Kid*

HERB SUTHERLAND

THE child was sleeping now.

He had clung to his mother when they put him to bed.

"Hush! You must sleep. To-morrow——"

"I want to stay here with you—always!"

The Knights had tutored him twelve hours of every day since he was three, yet the boy didn't want to go. That was something!

John got up and went to the window.

The figure was still there in the dark square, watching the house.

He trembled, and fear, like a cold spoon, stirred his bowels. Had the boy talked?

He felt Mary beside him, and turned, blocking the window with his back.

"John!"

"The boy is sleeping."

She bent over the child, smoothing the blankets.

"This one will live," he said harshly, "not like the other two."

Beyond the furthest house-tops the sky was bright, and a soft April wind brought in the celebrations from

the town. The square was silent. Nothing stirred.

'Why should it?' he thought bitterly. 'It is not their son.'

"Go to bed," he said.

The noise suddenly rose to a frenzy of thumping drums, and he saw the figure slip from the shadows and come towards the house.

He went downstairs. .

"In Moscow," a voice said, "the snow is this high."

The Knight had his hand out in the Teutonic Salute, and the mockery of the greeting unnerved John for a moment. Then he saw the eye on the breast-plate, and recognised the Order. He knelt quickly, arms out and hands together palms upward, in the traditional stance of humility before the Knights.

"For Adolf's sake," the Knight growled, "get up before I vomit." He pushed past John into the house.

"No lights!" The voice was curt. It had no accent.

"Sit down, man. Cigaretts?"

The Knight smoked, his hands cupping the glowing end. It was impossible to make out his features.

The boy must have talked, why else this visit in the middle of the night?

"What's it feel like to be the father of the new Germanic Messiah?"

He could vaguely make out the eye on the breast-plate. The Knight belonged to the Order of Heinrich the True. Heini the Eye, the English called them.

"It is a great honour."

"Your wife?"

## THE BLOND KID

"My wife, she——" the words stuck in his throat like rough stones.

"—is blessed among women——"

"—is blessed among women, that through her, the great wrong done the race of Teutonic Knights is now righted, for unto her was born Adolf the Younger, son of Adolf Thorson the Martyr, as was prophesied by the Martyr Himself the night He was crucified by the Children of Churchill in the year 1905 according to the old calendar."

"My, you have got it pat." The Knight eased himself in the chair. "Do you believe it?"

"Yes," said John. "Don't you?"

"I don't know."

There was a pause.

"D'you know what I think?" the Knight said. "The Martyr had black hair."

It would come now—something awful and terrible. There had never been blasphemy like this, not even when the English joked among themselves.

He waited.

Nothing happened.

"I do not permit such blasphemy in my house."

"Your house?"

"Mine—until twelve o'clock to-night."

"So," the stranger said, "the golden days are over. Where are you going—that little room in Duff Cooper Place with no water?"

"No. I have the promise of two rooms in Montgomery Street. There's a tap in the yard."



## THE BLOND KID

"A tap eh, and water? Bit of a come down for the earthly father of the New Adolf, isn't it? Moscow!" the Knight swept the room with his hands, "twelve rooms and a garden, and now a tap in the back yard."

"I'm glad," John said angrily. "Yes, a tap in the back yard—but people will speak to me again."

The fear got him then, and he knelt.

"Moscow's teeth," the Knight snarled, "get up, man! Adolf, Adolf, all over the world, crawl, crawl!"

The Knight turned his back and lit another cigarette.

"I've brought you some tea," he said.

"Tea?"

"It used to be our national drink, before the Martyrdom."

"OUR national drink?"

"Yes—OURS! Sweet Adolf man, d'you think I'm one of them?"

"Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am. I'm English, a Child of Churchill, like you."

The man was lying.

"How do I know?"

"Do I talk like a German, am I fat, would a German blaspheme as I've done to-night? Relax, old man!"

The Knight chuckled. "In Berlin the tea was hot. But as it's a major crime to light a fire from the beginning of April till the end of October owing to the fuel shortage, we'll have to try it cold. Get me a bowl."

Berlin! If the man were English, there was only one way he could have got to the capital, for the Children

of Churchill were confined to a three-mile limit round the town of their birth. Berlin! Perhaps——

“Hurry, man!”

The Knight began to stir the bowl.

“It doesn’t seem to make much difference,” he said after a while. “The damned stuff won’t dissolve. Here—you try.”

John wished he could strike a match. He had never seen tea before. He put his lips to the bowl, and drank. It was tasteless, and the leaves stuck in the throat.

“In times of crisis,” the Knight said, “before the Martyrdom, our people used to sip tea.” He took a long draught, and spat. “Adolf the Martyr, no wonder those bastards lord it over us!”

“How did you get to Berlin?”

The Knight put the bowl down.

“The football team.”

“My two sons?”

“They’re dead—vapourised.”

There was no shock in the confirmation of ten years’ silence.

“Charlie, he was the elder—we saw him score the first goal on the mobile television set, then it blacked out.”

“He scored four more,” said the Knight. “We won nine nothing. A great mistake that, beating them at their national game. But dammit, we couldn’t help it, they were so fat.”

“They said we lost.”

“We won all right. Then they took us to the vapour

chambers. We were medically examined first—they're very thorough. We made quite an impression, being so lean. One of the doctors was a woman. She wanted to get rid of her husband." He paused. "I killed her—after she had taught me German."

He would tell Mary, later, when she had got used to the boy being gone.

He remembered one night especially. Charlie would be ten at the time. It was long after curfew, and he had stood by the window, waiting, sick with worry, for Charlie was always in trouble. It was winter, and the boys had gone to the forest outside the town for wood. It was nearly dawn when they came back. They had been attacked by wolves. Charlie had shoved young Henry up a tree. He killed two of them. The teeth marks would be there on his arms, that last moment in the chambers.

"There's so much we don't know," the Knight said. "Their calendar. It starts at the Martyrdom—1905 to us. To-day is the first day of their New Year—555, an ordinary April day to us, in the year 2500. Have you ever thought what began our calendar—what event?"

"No," John lied, "never."

"Never? You disappoint me. Charlie mentioned it first, and Charlie wasn't a thinker. I thought—never mind. Can you tell me this? Why did they spare our race? They exterminated the Jews, Russians, Americans, French, the coloured races—why did they leave us?"

"They spared the Italians."

"That's understandable—nobody can make ice-cream like them—but why us?"

"The Martyr had a son," John said wearily—the Knight knew it all. "He was taken by our race and never heard of again. He was nine years old—the same age as the boy upstairs. On his cross, the Martyr prophesied that in the year 555 the son would be returned by the English to his people. We were spared to fulfil that prophesy."

"You believe that blond kid upstairs is the son of Adolf Thorson?"

"Yes."

The Knight was silent for a moment.

"Charlie said they spared us because they had to have someone to hate."

Charlie! the origins of the English calendar, the Italians and their ice-cream, the sparing of the English—it was Charlie who had betrayed him, not the boy upstairs.

It was obvious now. The Knight was probably there when they administered the truth drug.

It was a pity, the wasted hours he had put in with the blond kid. If only the Knight were English, what possibilities!

He was curious now, about other places.

"Our people in Berlin—do they live like us?"

"Lublin, Berlin, it's all the same. They wear the yellow cross of Churchill on their back, and every New Year's Day, the Germanic New Year of course, they wash the streets as an act of penance. They eat, sleep, produce more Children of Churchill—and grovel!"

"Have you been to England?"

## THE BLOND KID

"No," said the Knight. "That was a dream. It—it always will be a dream."

"Why? You're a Heinrich the True."

"Adolf Thorson!" the Knight snarled. "I beat them at football, I learn their language, I kill them. What more do you want? A piece of stone from London to hide in a dark cupboard?"

"Can you read?"

John regretted the question immediately, then remembered that it didn't matter now, he had already been betrayed.

"I can neither read nor write." The lie came smoothly. "Even the doctor jibbed at that. It is the greatest of all crimes—for us."

The celebrations were still going on in the town.

"Amazing, isn't it?" the Knight said. "We're so licked, spineless, they fear nothing. They might at least have honoured us by putting a guard around the kid."

Who would want to harm the boy?

"John." Fear gripped him, and he sprang to his feet. Mary had come into the room.

"The boy!"

"He's asleep."

The Knight was standing.

"I'm going now," he said.

He hesitated, then suddenly kissed Mary on the brow, and they heard him move along the hall and out into the street.

"Oh, John," Mary said, "I'm so afraid."

\* \* \* \* \*

The square was crowded. It was warm, and John would have liked to have wiped the dark grease-paint from his face. He glanced at Mary. She held the stick tightly in her hands, balancing awkwardly. He tried to straighten himself, and felt again the weight of the hump strapped to his back. They were thorough—the whole world watching and the father a hunchback, the mother a cripple.

They stood facing the house. Immediately in front of them was a row of the Order of Heinrich the True. He wondered which was the Knight. They were so alike from behind.

The Daughters of Eva were singing, the sun glistening on their fair hair. He couldn't understand the words, but the song was sad, and reluctantly, he had to admit that they could sing. Above the door was a huge picture of the Martyr, the straight, straw-coloured hair almost covering the left eye. He remembered the blasphemy of the Knight. Below were the three smaller portraits of the Muscovite Trinity, Churchill the Damned, Roosevelt the Jew, and Stalin the Wolf. Churchill's face was in profile, which accentuated the hooked nose and weak chin, and made the brow even smaller under the huge thatch of black hair. All around the square were tall crosses decorated with holly, and bearing the mystic Teutonic 3.

Curiously he wondered about the different Orders. Hermann the Good was easy, they were always so overdressed and gross. Those to the right and left of the centre belonged to Martin the Faithful. They had been

forestalled in the central position of the square by the Knights of Heinrich the True, and were still sulking. On either side were the lower Orders—Julius the Law-Giver, Horst the Forerunner, Reinhart the Little Martyr. Some of them were drunk. The cameras were manned by Joseph the Word.

He felt sorry for the small contingent of Italians present. They looked so ill at ease, and sad. He remembered what the Knight had said about them, and suppressed a desire to giggle.

The singing stopped.

A Knight, who had been standing on his own, turned and faced the crowd.

The Children of Churchill knelt.

John suddenly became aware of Mary. To his horror, she was still standing.

"Kneel!" he hissed.

"I can't, I——" was she crying, or was it laughter—"these sticks they tied to my legs—I can't bend my knees."

The desire to giggle came again.

The Knight was speaking. The voice was cold, as if it owned no body. It was relayed by a microphone behind, which automatically translated the words into English for the Children of Churchill.

The speaker was Adolf Krupp von Bohlen, descendant of the one Knight who had been with the Martyr to the end, and lived.

He spoke of the First War of Defence, the Martyr's heroic part as a Boy, and the English betrayal. The

Second War of Defence, the English Jewish-American treachery, the flooding of the Fatherland with the Russian beasts, and the Martyr's death before Berlin in the year One. The voice paused, then with a slight tremor sketched the abduction of the Martyr's son.

Some of the English were weeping.

Then the Third War of Defence, and his family's part in it, and the defeat of the traitors in the year 55.

John had heard it so often before—the Martyr's prophecy on the cross; the Mystery of the Three—Three Wars, the Three Fives, the Third Son.

He remembered the boy's birth, and the excitement of the German doctor, and how the Knights had come with paper and pencil and worked out what year it would be when the child was nine, and Mary lying there in the little room.

He remembered the questions they asked.

"Name?"

"Davidson."

"First name?"

"John."

"Occupation?"

"Carpenter."

"Wife's name?"

"Mary."

"Mary?" The questioner had looked round at the others. "You should have been called Joseph," he cried. The Knights had howled with laughter.

What was funny about Joseph?

The Daughters of Eva were singing now. It was the



## THE BLOND KID

song of the Valhallan Hosts at the birth of the Martyr, in the little Prussian village by the Baltic.

“Stille Nacht,  
Heilige Nacht.”

The tune always moved him. It was as if he were standing before a great truth. And the old thoughts warmed in his mind. What was the beginning, what event?

A trumpet blared:•

There was silence for a moment.

Then in a rich baritone the Knights sang ‘Little Adolf, we wait, we wait’. It was smooth and oversweet, like wine he had once tasted in the town.

The singing stopped.

The boy appeared at the door, and walked slowly down the steps.

“Sire,” the Knight said, “welcome home.”

It would soon be time to stand and confront the child. Poor kid. Poor, blond kid!

One of the Knights of Horst the Forerunner was absently patting the bottom of a Daughter of Eva.

“I have waited long for this,” said the boy, “555 years.”

John took Mary by the hand, and they moved haltingly up to the boy.

“Who are these people?” the child asked.

“Sire, the Englishman and his wife who have looked after you these nine years.”

## THE BLOND KID

The boy turned. He took in the hump, and the stick. There was horror in his eyes.

John knelt.

The lips were trembling, the eyes pleading. Slowly, John willed him to calmness.

It was forbidden, but he smiled. There was a flicker of recognition in the boy's eyes, then they closed.

He spat.

It was warm and gentle on the face, like a kiss.

"I know them not!"

There was a pause, then came a great roar from the square, and the air was filled with black armbands.

A band struck up.

He was back with his own people now, kneeling. It hadn't been too bad. He only hoped the boy wouldn't grieve too much at first.

The child was mounting a big white stallion. In a few moments he would pass on his way out of the square.

We are licked, spineless, the stranger had said. They fear nothing from us.

He noticed the hands of the Knight standing in front of him. They were fine hands—lean fingers, and long, clean nails. They were trembling. Was the man ill?

The procession had started.

He saw the right hand disappear into the folds of the cloak. It came out. The sleeve, brushed half-way up the arm, hung for a moment then dropped.

There were teeth marks all the way up to the elbow. In the hand was a knife.

## THE BLOND KID

He took the wrist in both hands, and held.

"Charlie," he said.

They were still cheering.

"Charlie!"

"Let go, old man. I told you—Charlie's dead."

The procession drew near.

"The whole world is watching. The knife will show their infallibility. Let go!"

He was tiring. He would have to give up.

"Charlie—I can read—and write!"

For a moment the hand slackened, then it grew taut.

"Even I cannot do that."

It was no good. He bent his head, and bit.

The knife dropped to the ground.

"The blond kid—he taught me."

The procession was moving out of the square. There was momentary confusion as the Orders of Heinrich and Martin fought for the position behind the leaders.

"I'll come to-morrow night," Charlie said, "when you've moved. Montgomery Street, isn't it?"

# *The Case of Omega Smith*

GUTHRAM WALSH

THERE was an air of restrained excitement in the Athenæum. Feelings were running high. Voices were raised in heated argument, in displays of emotion unbecoming to men of science and culture, and alien to the traditional decorum of the Club.

"The whole idea is monstrous! It is wrong in principle even if it were practical, which I doubt. Here we are on the threshold of the twenty-sixth century and as ready to prostrate the dignity of man as were those who submitted to the dictatorships of some five hundred years ago." The speaker turned to the little bald-headed man beside him. "What do you say, Smith?"

Omega Smith stirred uneasily in his chair, fumbling nervously with the tiny memory-box, strapped watch-like to his wrist.

"Well, I agree with you in a way, but——" he smiled apologetically and pointed to his memory-box. "After all, we use these little electronic devices to remember things for us. It's the same thing really but on a larger——"

"Nonsense!"

"Smith is right, you know," the Professor of Justice and Ethics intervened, commanding attention by the calm deliberation of his voice. "It is the same thing in principle. We use these electronic brains to remember facts and details, thereby leaving our true physiological brains greater freedom to think and to reason. Surely, it is reasonable to use the new thinking machines to do our routine thinking for us, thereby leaving ourselves free for higher contemplation."

Omega Smith's dog-like eyes gazed gratefully at his rescuer.

"Precisely," he said. "And after all, machines do not make mistakes as men do. As Keeper of the Files and Custodian of the National Records, I know only too well."

"I still think the idea is monstrous and inhuman. Why, these judging machines could sentence a man to death."

"Not to death," the Professor corrected.

"Well, to transportation to the moon, which is worse in my opinion."

"Now you're being sentimental," the Professor remonstrated, though not unkindly. "Most judicial procedures are merely matters of arbitration according to law. And knowledge of the law, to all intents and purposes, is purely factual and therefore within the scope of a machine. Even in trying a man under criminal law, the judge is no free thinker; he merely presides over the trial and his qualification for doing so is his thorough knowledge of law. In the old days when there were graded punishments for those guilty of crime, the matter

was more complicated. Now that we no longer inflict punishments it is simple enough. A man guilty of any crime is unfit to be in society, therefore we banish him: that is our decision, not the machine's. And surely, it is foolish to waste the finest judicial brains in the country on work that machines can do."

A sudden burst of impulses from Omega Smith's memory-box reminded him that it was time to go. He was due at the Senate House at four o'clock to receive official recognition for his public service in perfecting the nation's filing system. They were going to reward him with a new memory-box; one of the more exclusive kind like that of the Professor of Justice and Ethics. He, Omega Smith, was to be elevated to the mandarin class.

It was with a light heart and a jaunty little stride that he stepped through the impressive portals of the Athenæum, leaving its old world atmosphere of glass and plastics behind. How good it was to be in the fresh air and sunshine again, with the spacious lawns, majestic trees and gay flowers of modern London around him.

He decided not to travel by one of the radio-controlled taxis, but to walk. His way to the Senate House took him along the grassy banks of the river, along the wide, resilient footpath, screened by flowering shrubs and fruit trees from the swoosh of cars and taxis which flashed along the Embankment. Here and there, cunningly concealed by groups of taller trees, the ventilating shafts of the underworld reached skywards; reminders of

the vast dormitories beneath, of the technicians and artisans.

The Senate House was an imposing building, beautiful in an austere sort of way. The preserved remains of the old Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey nestled like two ornamental summer-houses in a corner of its spacious grounds.

From the Senate House, the formalities concluded, Omega Smith was sent to the National Physiological Laboratory to be measured for the new memory-box. The girl technician who tended the apparatus he thought particularly attractive. She chatted pleasantly about nothing as he relaxed beneath the electrodes while she recorded the natural rhythms of his brain. In the semi-darkness, the glow from the cathode ray tubes shone caressingly, like moonlight, on her hair; it lent an ethereal grace to the delicate movements of her hands as they manipulated the controls; it gave a petal-like translucence to her white blouse and shorts and a softer contour to her tanned young limbs. He watched her check and examine the tracings before disconnecting the electrodes.

"We shall have to ignore these little bursts of excitement, won't we, Mr. Smith?" she said, smiling roguishly as she showed him the recorded analysis of his brain.

"Need we?" he ventured.

They arranged to have dinner together that evening.

Afterwards they went for a cruise on the river. Omega Smith felt very, very happy. He told her all about the filing system. He explained how the pattern of minute

holes in the thin metal identity cards which everyone carried was a complete record of the life-history of the owner. Proudly, he showed her the little group of holes which had been punctured in his card at the Senate House that very afternoon. They joked about the sparsity of holes in her card compared with his as, with heads together, they held them up to the moon and counted the tiny stars.

Iota was happy too. She had never before been out with a man who was entitled to possess a super memory-box. Perhaps she would marry this one. He was certainly no Adonis, but his brain rhythms were quite normal and that was what really mattered. How beautiful the moon was! She felt his arm tighten about her shoulders as the boat rolled slightly in the passing wake of another.

Later, by the St. Paul's entrance to the underworld, he kissed her good-night.

“Don't forget to collect your new memory-box on Saturday,” she laughed as they parted.

He watched her trip gaily down the escalator, growing smaller and smaller into the distance.

On Saturday, Omega Smith rose early. He put on his best shirt and shorts and, humming a cheerful little tune, set off for the Palace of Justice to be officially presented with his new memory-box. Not until he was within the entrance hall of the great building did he realise that he had left his old memory-box behind. There was no time to go back for it. He stood for a moment, bewildered by the profusion of doors and passage entrances which



surrounded him. Room C49B, he was sure that was right. He pressed the selector switch of that number and waited. A green light appeared and floated away along one of the passages. He followed it through the maze of corridors and escalators to room C49B. The door opened itself automatically as the light hovered above it. A man stepped quickly out and hurried away along the corridor as Smith entered. C49B was a small room, furnished with but one solitary chair, which was surprising. Perhaps it was B49C he wanted. How annoying it was to have left his memory-box behind. He tried to open the door again, but it had locked itself behind him. There were two other doors; they too were locked. He tried all three doors again, knocking on each in turn; then he tried shouting.

"This is ridiculous," he said, and stood gazing hopelessly at the smooth, bare walls which imprisoned him.

The tiny windows, which were set high near the ceiling, offered no hope of exit. After a time he began to feel worried, almost desperate, but at long last one of the doors opened. A man in the blue uniform of a Palace of Justice warden thrust an expressionless face into the room and shouted, "This way, the judge will consider your appeal now."

"I'm Omega Smith, I seem to have got into the wrong room by mistake."

"Put your identity card into this machine here," said the man in a toneless voice, "and state your grounds for appeal to the clerk."

## THE CASE OF OMEGA SMITH

The clerk was seated before what appeared to be a giant calculating machine.

"I don't want to appeal. I——"

"Then just sign this admission of guilt," said the clerk, producing a document from the desk which stood beside the machine.

"I'm not guilty of anything," Smith shouted; what fools these two men were.

"Then you wish to appeal against the verdict," said the clerk.

"What verdict, you ass?"

The clerk permitted a supercilious smile to relieve his otherwise expressionless face.

"I assume you would not be appealing against a verdict of 'not guilty'," he said.

"Tell me what I'm supposed to be guilty of," said Smith, who was beginning to understand his predicament.

"That is not my business," said the clerk. "You must address your appeal to the judge which is about to be switched on."

"Look here, I'm Omega Smith——"

"Switch on the identification machine," the clerk interrupted.

The warden pressed the appropriate button, then resumed his standing to attention. He always stood to attention while the judge was actually switched on.

"Iota Jones; female; born 2480 A.D., British; address 5967, BZK, Area Sub. E.C.4; physiology technician, qualified grade 2B——" the metallic voice of the machine

droned out the rest of the information which was recorded on the card.

Omega Smith stood aghast, listening to the whir of the judge's mechanism. What a farce it all was! A mathematician had tried to explain to him once how the judging machines worked; how they had been developed from the chess-playing machines which had amused scientists some hundreds of years ago. He knew that, during a trial, the evidence for and against was reduced to a series of functions which were combined into an equation which the machine then attempted to solve. He knew that the machine was so primed that it could call on any point of law without hesitation.

Omega Smith tried desperately to explain his predicament to the judge, but of what influence could anything that he had to say have on the machine's investigation into the original trial? It was like asking a chess-playing machine to play bridge. The result was inevitable. The appeal was dismissed.

"This is all a terrible mistake," he protested. "That identity card was not mine, it——"

"Obviously," said the clerk, dryly.

"How could I make a successful appeal when I have nothing to appeal against?"

"The regulations as laid down under the Judicial Machines Act do not admit such a possibility," said the clerk blandly.

"Confound the regulations. I can explain everything if you will only listen."

"I have no power to interfere with the course of

justice," said the clerk. "Judgment has been given and the case is now closed."

Dazed and bewildered, Omega Smith allowed himself to be led away.

The guard who escorted him in the conveyance which took convicts from the Palace of Justice to the Lunar Rocket Station was in a talkative mood.

"I don't know what you've done and I don't care," he confided. "You don't seem a bad sort of chap, so I don't mind giving you a few tips."

"That is very kind of you," said Smith, his thoughts elsewhere.

"That's all right," said the guard. "I had a brother who was a rocket pilot once. Did his training in Siberia, he did. In the winter when it was dark all the time that was, mind you. You get a fortnight dark and a fortnight light on the moon, by the way. Night and day they calls it, but it's more like summer and winter really. Twice as cold as the South Pole, so they tell me, when it's dark that is. It's the daytime what's the worst though. You wouldn't think that, would you? Sky as black as ink and all the stars out yet the sun is so hot that even the rocks nearly melt. No atmosphere to speak of, you see."

"My brother told me that if you leave a piece of ordinary metal exposed on a rock, it just melts and boils away. Caused a lot of trouble with the first rockets, that did. They've got it all taped now, of course. But you have to live underground all the time though. All the work above ground has to be done just before or just after sunrise or sunset, before it gets too hot or too cold."

"It sounds pretty grim to me," said Smith, wondering if it was better to try and escape when they reached the station or whether it would be wiser to wait and hope for the best.

"The fungus they give you to eat doesn't taste too bad, so they tell me," the guard continued. "It's the only thing they can grow on the moon, underground of course. Now that's what you want to do, get a job growing fungus if you can, then you won't have to work in the uranium mines. You get plenty of water, you see, in the fungus gardens. Water's scarce you know."

"What are these fungus gardens like?" Smith asked.

"Well, I've never seen 'em myself, mind you, but they're just caves. The stuff grows on the walls like strips of brown leather. Doesn't look very appetising at first, but you get used to it, you know, like having to live in a pressure suit all the time. You'll find that a bit hard at first."

"I've heard that it sends some people mad," said Smith.

"Moon sickness, they call it," said the man. "My brother saw a case once. A gang of men had just finished a shift in one of the uranium mines and were loading the stuff on to the rocket when one of them ran amok with moon sickness. Just on dawn, it was. Before anyone could stop him, he pinched a spanner and undid all the bolts on his pressure suit. Blew up like a balloon, he did, and burst in a cloud of red smoke."

"Just undid the bolts, did he?" said Smith, more to himself than to the guard. "I'll remember that."

## THE CASE OF OMEGA SMITH

It was a clear moonlit night with a soft breeze blowing in from the sea when they reached the rocket station.

Omega Smith drank deep of the fresh night air before putting on the helmet of the pressure suit they gave him. One of the station guards screwed down the bolts and told him how to work the valves. There was no chance of escape. Omega Smith realised that now. But he couldn't really believe that these were his last few minutes on earth: the sound of waves breaking on the beach, of the wind rustling the leaves of a near-by tree, and all the tiny sounds of night were too real to become just memories. There was Iota too; he must see her again somehow. It was the lonely rocket out there, towering in grim, glistening silence on its island of concrete that was unreal.

Miles away, on the summit of Parliament Hill, Iota Jones, star-gazing in the company of a casual boy-friend, saw the green comet-like trail of the rocket crawl into the sky. She was cross and a little hurt because Omega had failed to keep his appointment. The boy she was with was not entitled to possess even an ordinary memory-box.

It was not until six months later, when she had to produce her identity card on the occasion of her marriage, that a clue to the mystery of Omega Smith's disappearance was revealed. Even then, it was some time before the mystery was solved.

Committees of Inquiry were detailed to investigate the matter most thoroughly. Two forensic engineers, with the highest qualifications, examined and reported

## THE CASE OF OMEGA SMITH

favourably on the mathematical integrity of the judging machine concerned. The Professor of Justice and Ethics himself cross-examined the machine on the most abstruse points of law and declared it to be without fault. .

The Case of Omega Smith, as it was called, became a subject for a leading article in *The Times* and an item for debate in the Senate. Indignant headlines glared the injustice of it from the front pages of the popular press. In the Athenæum, as in all the best clubs and in other places where men of science and culture gather together, it stimulated much academic discussion.

# *The Machine That Was Lonely*

ROBERT WELLS

ALL day long they had wandered by the side of the black canal and Iliusha had picked a bunch of singing flowers, whose songs grew pale and faded as they wilted in the pitiless, Martian sun.

"I wish there'd be a canal car in the next place we come to," said Starr, "or anything that will save us walking. It's difficult enough to breathe with the equipment switched off. If only we could do this journey in a wagon or something!"

"Maybe the next town will be as impossible to enter as the last," said his wife flatly. "Is it four years or five that we've walked? Why don't we stop in some quiet hills and give up pretending?"

"Four years," said Starr, "but the activity can't last for ever. Remember how low the count was at Fourth City?"

"And how high in New Canada not a week ago?"

They trudged on in silence, and low clouds brought a strange, thin rain which damped the skin-like, plastic overalls they wore and obscured the visors of their helmets, falling without a sound into the forgetfulness of the water.



## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

Later, where the canal ended in an enormous desert of rock, they camped. It was night now. The rain had stopped and the twin moons glided tirelessly between the torn ends of the rain-clouds. An old jetty stretched out its legs into the canal and sitting behind one of its pillars Starr and his wife removed their helmets for a moment and kissed.

Each was afraid to ask the other those questions which the past four years seemed to have been spent in avoiding: Are we really the last? Can the bitter war have destroyed every inter-universal colony and Earth too?

"No," whispered Starr, comfortingly, answering the unasked questions, "it's certainly bad, but maybe we've seen only the worst. To-morrow or the next day we'll come to a place where real people will be rebuilding and we'll run into town yelling and they'll shake our hands and say, 'Where were you when it all happened?' and we'll tell them: 'We were on the sea-bed photographing the dead towns and . . . and . . .'" he stopped, gasping for breath in his excitement.

Gently Iliusha leaned forward and kissed his forehead then closed his helmet down. An hour later, when he was asleep with his arm around her, she cried a little because she knew what was true, and then she, too, slept. When the tears were dried on her cheeks the moons had already begun to set.

"There! You see! You see!" shouted Starr. "There's a town! A town! And it's not touched!"

"Where? Where?" cried Iliusha and ran to the jetty-top to join him standing in the morning sun.

## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

Starr pointed triumphantly and certainly there, not two miles away, was a city, glinting and sparkling and trembling with sun caught up among spheres and glass domes and towers of crystal. It stood at the edge of the rock desert with mountains soaring behind it.

"Get the map," said Starr.

They took out the map and spread it on the hot stone of the jetty.

"It's Mountain Roads," said Iliusha, pointing.

They began to walk eagerly towards it.

There was a hundred years' supply of food in the icy avenues of the deep-freeze safes sunk below the city, but no people. Clocks told an exact, universal hour, but there was no one to be punctual. The great dynamos which operated the oxygen plant continued to turn, drawing on their ceaseless atomic power. There was no one to turn them off.

"Where did they go?" murmured Starr, standing in an abandoned square and whispering as though the sound of his voice could smash the city's enormous silence into fragments around him. "Not a cat or dog—nor even a sign of panic."

"Perhaps they left together like the Zone W people to try and reach Jupiter," said Iliusha, who held his hand.

"Come on," said Starr wildly. "It's ridiculous! There must be someone!"

Starting forward he gave a fierce halloo.

"Don't! Don't!" screamed Iliusha, her hands dragging urgently at his suit.

## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

Both voices boomed away and fell short in the suburbs of the city on thin, uninhabited morning air.

"We're going through this place systematically, Iliusha," said Starr, gripping her arm. "We'll find out what's happened or we'll find someone or we'll find something."

They began their search.

They entered house after house, exploring factories and then schools and at last public buildings, but could not find a sign of life or death. Here and there a machine which required no tending, nor could run down of its own accord in a lifetime, continued to perform its now meaningless job. In the City Hall they discovered a newspaper which was dated September 19th, three days after the rockets had carried Earth's war to Mars.

Helmets discarded, they dined in the banqueting hall, eating food from the vast stores below the city. Neither spoke much, although in the normally conditioned air of the interior of the building it would not have exhausted them even to have had the quarrel each felt to be imminent.

Starr was stubbornly determined to continue the search. He was unable to entertain any doubt that somewhere, some day, he would discover survivors of his own kind and recommence the way of life he dared not admit had ended.

Iliusha watched him putting sweet-corn into his mouth and although she loved him deeply, felt, too, a spasm of fear and hate for the desperate, unfamiliar mood she found him in.

## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

Late afternoon. They lay side by side in twin beds in a room whose windows looked over the square before City Hall. The air inside the room was frustrating, motionless: constantly the same, with neither temperature nor stillness varying. The silent, deep, red afternoon was the only moving thing except Iliusha who dozed restlessly, flicking her hands.

"Listen!"

Starr's words flapped against the walls angrily.

"Iliusha—for God's sake!"

She jerked upright. Her heart pounded, missed a beat, pounded on. Her husband stared at her madly.

"Say you can hear it," he hissed, cocking his head as though by speaking he might lose a drop of the precious sound.

"I hear it," said Iliusha.

Sweetly she heard the strong, clear sound of a voice, which seemed to belong to neither male nor female yet was tormentingly human and close, singing an unfamiliar song in an unfamiliar language.

They ran into the square, buckling down their helmets. The singing whirled about them and against the red sky. It seemed to come from above their heads.

"This way," cried Starr, pointing to the University Building. They ran. The song continued.

In the entrance hall they heard the sound coming from an upper floor.

"Hey, hey! Hi!" yelled Starr. "Where are you? Hey, men here. Men!" He ran frantically up the great stair-

case, Iliusha following, terrified that it might be a recorder or some gramophone which by a crossed circuit had come cruelly to life to drive her husband mad.

The voice sang on.

Starr reached a door, flung it open; ran to another. As he threw this one open, too, the beautiful sound flooded around them and then abruptly stopped.

They stood in the room and stared at each other and about them. It was a plain room, with a few chairs and some filing cabinets and two desks, one with papers still on it. But in the corner farthest from them, trembling slightly and humming softly to itself, was the great, shining body of a machine which seemed to regard them inquisitively from a single, low-power bulb protruding like an eye from the system of dials and meters which covered the panel facing them.

"Was it that thing?" asked Starr. "That . . . that . . . lousy washing machine!"

The bulb glowed and suddenly, with a sound disconcertingly like a mechanical cackle, the machine began to cut grooves on a metal tape which ran laterally across the panel just below its glowing eye. A second later it spoke in a flat, uninflected voice.

"I'm glad to see you back. Aren't you surprised that I've learned to sing?"

It stood quivering expectantly, awaiting a reply.

Starr drew his gun. His face was grey and his lips drawn back in fear. He levelled the gun, but found that it pointed at Iliusha's stomach. She stood between him and the machine.

## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

"Don't be a fool," she pleaded. "How can this harm us? It's only a computer. It might be useful to us."

"She's right, you know," said the Machine encouragingly from behind her. "I may be only a witty combination of photo-electric cells and complicated circuits, but I can think about ten times as fast as you and I don't usually make mistakes. I've made some progress, too, you ought to admit that. It took me three years to learn to sing."

"How did you learn?" asked Iliusha uneasily and in a small voice, addressing the Machine over her shoulder.

"Well," it said, "I was lonely—wouldn't you have been! At first I thought I'd just have to be content with talking to myself till the power stopped—died, is what you used to say, isn't it? But then one winter I found that if I dropped the first unit power to . . ." It paused suddenly, giving its clicking chuckle. "But what's the point in boring you with technical details? Listen."

It seemed to gather itself for an effort. The bulb glowed violently. Again the sweet, inhuman song they had heard ten minutes before flowed into the room and about the building and out over the city.

"Well," said the Machine apologetically after recovering its normal voice, "that's it. I'm sorry I can't sing words. I can only talk words, you see. Singing's another matter since I learned it for myself."

"But suppose," said Starr overcoming his disbelief and addressing the Machine for the first time, "suppose I should shift a dial or cut your power to half or change a meter reading?"

## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

The Machine seemed to be bewildered by this question.

"But why should you want to?" it asked. "I don't interfere with you, do I? I could give you a nasty shock if I wanted to. I could even alter your meter reading by say, burning off your right hand, or cut your power to half by bombarding your left kidney with gamma rays. Don't look so scared—I'm certainly not proposing to do anything like that! Do you play chess?"

"Wonderful," cried Iliusha, clapping her hands. "I'll teach you to sing in words!"

She looked happily at Starr for approval, but found that his look was flat and cold.

"How long will it be before it learns to move?" whispered Starr apprehensively as they lay side by side that night. "I'm scared. Let's go out and cut the power now."

"How long will it be before it learns to generate its own?" said Iliusha scornfully. "Why are you so anxious to destroy miracles always?"

For Starr and Iliusha life, after that startling afternoon, developed a new centre and startlingly fresh interests. Iliusha was only concerned with teaching the Machine to perform new miracles of progress, Starr had no wish other than to induce it to assist him in proceeding with his search for an old life.

Iliusha taught the Machine to sing in words and sat hour after hour playing games of chess which she had no hope of winning. Starr, with its aid, built himself a telescope and morosely squatted on the far side of the

city in the clear nights, endlessly probing into space for some sign of life.

Two years passed. It was late Autumn and soon the poles would begin to freeze over completely and the water in the canals to recede.

Starr and his wife hardly spoke to each other now and having found some photographic apparatus intact, Starr would often leave the city for days at a time, knowing that neither the Machine, nor Iliusha would notice his absence.

Starr sat by a small fire at his camp in the hills at the eastern edge of the rock desert. He had been away from the city for a week and was now less than a day's march away on the return journey. Cold stars glittered in the sky and he found himself staring, as so many times he'd stared in the past, at the unglittering Earth setting early between two mountain peaks. As he watched it, he became aware that his eye was also watching a dot of white light which having been obscured at first by the mountains now became definite, travelling through the sky towards him.

He leapt to his feet. Now the rushing sound of it reached his ears, as weeping with recognition and despair he stretched out his hands to the beautiful, cylindrical rocket dipping to land which, ignoring his puny agony in the dark, vanished with a golden wink, letting the sky close over its flaring tail.

He reached the city next day, running the last few yards which brought him to the room where the Machine and Iliusha greeted his news indifferently.



## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

"Suppose it was a meteor?" said Iliusha. "Or a spaceship from another planet?"

"It was neither," said Starr. "This was an earth-ship like the one we came to Mars in. They'll be getting out now somewhere, wondering if anyone's left alive here!"

"So it's all going to begin again," said his wife bitterly.

Starr ignored her.

"They'll be sending messages by radio maybe," he said, "I've got to get over to the radio station and see if I can pick up something—and we'd better start sending a signal, too, so that they can pick us up if they're listening."

He ran from the room. Iliusha watched him go and turned to the Machine which shuddered softly in its corner.

"What are we to do?" she asked.

"Don't worry," said the Machine. "It may not have landed. Let us wait for a day or so."

Starr stayed away from the University Building and they saw nothing of him for the next three days. He sat at the transmitter, red-eyed and confident, sending the same message, listening fearfully to the same, barren static in his earphones when he switched the radio to 'Receive'. When he was not at the radio he dozed nervously at the viewer of his telescope, fishing in the deep, night sky for the faintest ripple of a silver rocket. But none came.

After a week the telephone rang. It was Iliusha.

"What have you heard?" she said.

"Nothing."

## THE MACHINE THAT WAS LONELY

"Fool," she said and he heard her laugh as she replaced the receiver.

That same evening, distantly across the city, Starr heard the Machine's song and knew that he would not have long to wait now.

With desperate cunning he lay awake two nights waiting for Iliusha to come. On the third night she came and he knocked her unconscious with a single blow. The gun she had brought to kill him was never fired.

The red and mauve light of a new morning fell in patterns of mosaic over the floor of the room where Iliusha sat with her hands tied and her face bruised. Her husband came in. His face was haggard, his hair wet with sweat. Around them the whole city was eerily quiet.

"Let's go," said Starr.

Gently for all his madness, he helped his wife up and led her down the staircase. She followed him obediently through the silent streets. She cried a little when they had been to the foundry and Starr carried away the biggest hammer he could find. Everywhere was so quiet. Four hours ago Starr had been to the power stations making sure each huge dynamo had whirled to a standstill. They made for the University Building.

The Machine was quiet. No light glowed in it.

"Don't," said Iliusha. "Look, it's quite dead already."

"I have come to judge the world," said Starr. He swung the hammer.

"Look," he said, "glass and wires, darling. Old metal and two miles of wire."

The hammer crunched into the wreckage.

Suddenly Iliusha found that she was kneeling on the floor trying to scream but hearing no sound come from herself. She fought desperately against the rope that bound her hands so that she could stuff them into her mouth to quench the noiseless scream. Infinitely distant, she seemed to see Starr gaping at her from the far side of his own madness. He leaned on the haft of the hammer, one hand upraised to shield his face from nothing.

Through and around and about them the song crashed and reverberated. It struggled in the narrow space until its very determination burst the door and it fled and they heard it tasting its new freedom in the hall, in the square, in the streets, racing away towards the mountains into final silence.

# *Hitch-hike to Paradise*

GEOFFREY WHYBROW

THE flight from Olympus earthwards had always in the old days been calm and uneventful. Indeed, on this occasion, too, for the first ninety million miles or so, nothing untoward occurred. Jupiter, after some desultory conversation with Hermes a short distance away to his right, had lapsed into silence, and was floating tranquilly down, lulled into somnolence by the soothingly swift motion and the whispering hiss of the atmosphere as it slid past. His eyes had closed, his chin had fallen forward on to his chest, and he had almost surrendered himself to sleep when, without warning, he was jerked sharply sideways and jolted into consciousness by the wind from an object which passed at tremendous speed immediately over his head. He looked up angrily.

"What in the name of Olympus was that, Hermes?" he demanded.

Hermes had seen the thing coming and had ducked to avoid it. He now stared at its quickly disappearing shape.

"It looks like a sort of a saucer, sir."

"Saucer? Who ever heard of a flying saucer, Hermes? Don't be ridiculous."

## HITCH-HIKE TO PARADISE

"I know it sounds ridiculous, sir. But that's what it looks like . . . Look out, sir! Here's another!"

This time they both ducked, but this time Jupiter also caught a glimpse of the phenomenon. "You're right, Hermes," he said after a brief pause. "It is a flying saucer. But it's a very big saucer. And there are creatures of some kind on it. Where can they be from, do you think?"

"The Earth, I imagine, sir."

Jupiter had now recovered his dignity, and they were dropping rapidly on the last stage of their journey. "I suppose you're right, Hermes," Jupiter said. "But it seems queer to me that a thing like that should happen just as I decided to revisit them for the first time after—how long is it?"

"Not very long, sir. Two or three thousand years or so."

"Do you think anyone knew we were coming?"

"Quite impossible, I should say, sir."

"It wasn't an attempt to stop us, you think?"

"Oh, no, sir."

"I should hate anyone to think I was in any way . . . dangerous. Particularly among the ladies."

Hermes, still keeping a wary eye open for the unexpected, grinned. "None of them ever thought that, sir."

"I hope not." Jupiter smiled reminiscently. "I suppose they're as handsome as ever? The ladies, I mean?"

"Handsome is as handsome does, sir."

"Even if it doesn't, it can sometimes be persuaded,"

## HITCH-HIKE TO PARADISE

Jupiter answered darkly. "Have we come the same way as we always did?"

"Almost, sir. Straight down the sun's path for most of the way. It used to be all the way when we visited Greece. But Apollo's a bit erratic over England, and we shall have to diverge a bit at the end."

"Well, don't diverge into any more of those flying saucers, Hermes."

They chose the roof-garden of a London sky-scraper for their landing, donning their cloaks of invisibility before touching down quietly on a little lawn surrounded by flower-beds.

"A little different from the olive-groves of Greece, sir," Hermes remarked, looking around him.

"Very different, Hermes. And most peculiar. What's wrong, Hermes? These buildings, for example. They don't look right."

Hermes walked to the edge of the roof and looked downwards. Roofs and walls as far as the eye could see gleamed in the sunlight. "Everything seems to be built of glass, sir."

"Unless my eyes deceive me," observed Jupiter, "this is starting to get interesting. People always were interesting, of course, but—— Let's drop into the street."

They stepped over the parapet of the skyscraper and floated slowly downwards. Jupiter's eyes had not deceived him. People, he decided, were even more interesting than usual. In the rooms and passages of the skyscraper into which they could see as they passed, and

## HITCH-HIKE TO PARADISE

in the street when they got there, everyone without exception wore the same natural uniform. They sat, stood, rode, or walked about in shameless nudity.

Jupiter gazed about him with relish. "I like the present customs here," he said at length. "I don't understand them, but I like them. The women——"

"Can I help you to understand them, sir?"

The voice appeared to come from a glass pillar near which they were standing, and both Jupiter and Hermes looked round, seeking its owner.

"Who's that?" Jupiter asked.

"Nucleus, sir," replied the voice.

"Nucleus?"

"Yes, sir. I'm only a very junior god, sir, and you've probably forgotten you ever created me. My department is Physics, and I'm down here a lot."

"Let's make ourselves visible," said Jupiter. "I'd like to see you again, Nucleus . . . Ah, that's better," he added, as the three gods faded up into full sight. "I remember you now. We had to appoint you to keep an eye on all that atom-splitting nonsense. Do mortals still pursue their scientific researches with the same misguided frenzy?"

"I'm afraid so, sir," replied Nucleus. "You may recall we had to save them from themselves on that occasion by making the atom unsplittable. The queer thing is that all they really want is to be what they call happy."

"Then they go about it in a very peculiar way," Hermes remarked.

"They are blind and lazy," said Jupiter sternly. "They

neither foresee nor try to think out the inevitable consequences of their actions. But what are you down here for this time, Nucleus?"

"Another of their silly inventions, sir. The one that brought about the change in building technique you've just remarked on—the Phi Beta Kappa Ray."

"And what did that do?"

"It enabled people not only to see things which the television companies put out—plays and Test matches and dull things of that sort—but anything else they wanted. It annihilated distance, penetrated walls and doors, and saw in the dark. There was no privacy for anyone. If any lady, for example, suspected that another lady's girlish figure was due to the efficiency of her foundation garment, she could just touch a switch, watch the whole operation of her toilet from start to finish, and have enough to gossip about for the rest of the day. There were some very surprising revelations."

"I've no doubt there were," said Jupiter dryly.

"Having lost their privacy," went on Nucleus, "people thought they might as well go the whole hog and live in public completely. Hence the glass walls and roofs and the complete absence of clothing."

"But not, apparently, any absence of colour," observed Jupiter, gazing around appreciatively. "The women are very decorative."

"Body-sticks are obtainable in all colours, sir. The Haute Couture of five hundred years ago has now become the Haute Couleur. The fashion this year is narrow diagonal stripes of any colour you like. Last year it was



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more severe—pinks and blues in wavy horizontal sweeps and much wider.”

“It might suit some figures, I suppose,” said Jupiter. “What about the men?”

“Very subfusc, sir. Sunburn body-sticks only.”

“H’m . . . Well, let’s have a look round.”

They started walking slowly along the street. It was populous, and they were jostled more than once by impatient men who sped hither and thither on evidently important business. The women walked less purposefully, eyeing each other (and the men) with critical curiosity. The colours they wore had for the most part been put on with care and even subtlety. But Jupiter’s flippant mood had passed.

“Tell me, Nucleus. Why do the men look so grim beneath their artificial tan?”

Nucleus smiled. “You happen to have landed in Boffin Row. The scientists’ quarter, sir. And scientists are like that.”

“Vulcan is always very deedy, I know.”

“It used to be called ‘Savile Row’, sir, and was occupied largely by expensive tailors——”

“Who went out of business for obvious reasons. But surely even a scientist smiles sometimes?”

“I doubt it, sir. They’re all concentrating on that.” He pointed to a notice on the wall above their heads. It ran:

## NOTICE

Now that World Peace has been an established fact for some centuries, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee

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has decided to devote the funds at its disposal to a more immediately useful object, viz., the Promotion of Human Happiness. Having reviewed the whole state of the World to-day, it has come to the conclusion that the gravest menace to human happiness now extant is the lack of privacy which has resulted from the discovery of the Phi Beta Kappa Ray, and that the only way in which man can restore the old decencies is by finding a method of making himself invisible. The Committee—now reconstituted the Nobel Human Happiness Committee—accordingly offers a prize of One Million World Crowns to the first World Citizen to solve this secret in an acceptable manner.

The Committee will sit in the Guildhall, London, from 10.00 hours to 16.00 hours each day during the month of Churchill, 2500, to hear claims.

By Order,

WILFRED WILBERFORCE (Kt.),  
Chairman.

Jupiter read the notice twice. He turned to Nucleus, twinkle in his eye. "It looks as if we must come to the rescue again," he said. "But if we have got to help them, at least we will get some fun out of it. Where is this Guildhall, Nucleus?"

"In the Money Market, sir. Between the Meat Market and the Poultry and Fish Markets."

"A strange place to choose . . . But lead me to it. Come, Hermes."

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Nucleus murmured obediently, "Yes, sir," and in a few minutes they reached their destination, to find a large crowd there already and waiting resignedly. A four-deep queue stretched from the entrance for some hundreds of yards along the road. There were fat men, thin men, and medium-sized men, all looking strained and anxious, and all carrying bulging dispatch-cases which looked oddly civilised against their unclothed bodies.

In their invisible form Jupiter and his companions marched unchallenged past the head of the queue and into the room where the Committee sat deliberating. It consisted of three elderly gentlemen, and the three gods slipped silently into three empty chairs opposite them. Gradually, they brought themselves into visibility. Then, as the Committee members looked up, they became invisible again. After a short pause they again restored themselves to mortal sight.

"Well, upon my soul!" ejaculated the Chairman as soon as he could find words. "That was wonderful! It was like developing a photograph. First there was nothing. Then there was a smudge here and there as the picture began to build up, until eventually there was the finished product. I gather you've discovered the secret of invisibility. Marvellous!"

"Good-morning, sir," said Jupiter.

"Good-morning," said Hermes and Nucleus.

"Excuse me, Mr.—er——" began the Committee-man on the Chairman's right.

"Jupiter."

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"—Mr.—er—Jupiter. Excuse me, but would you mind doing it all over again?"

"Why not?" And the three gods began to disappear from view again, starting, unlike the Cheshire cat, with the smiles on their faces.

"Splendid!" cried the Chairman. "And now, please fade up once more. . . . That's it! Splendid! Excellent! Don't you think so? Featherstone? Cranwell?"

The other two members of the Committee agreed that it was a superlative display, but wanted more.

"Very good indeed," said Featherstone. "But how do you do it?"

"Exactly," said Cranwell. "How do you do it?"

"We can't hand out a million World Crowns for just a few personal appearances and disappearances."

"Quite. You may be doing it with mirrors or something for all we know. We must have facts."

The Chairman looked at his watch. "Will you take some refreshment?" he asked. "It's nearly eleven o'clock."

"Could you make our worthy Chairman vanish, too?" asked Featherstone suddenly.

"Or Featherstone?" asked Cranwell. "Or me?"

"Nothing easier." Jupiter leaned forward and touched the Chairman's hand. In a moment he had faded from view. Featherstone and Cranwell looked at each other, doubtful and a little apprehensive.

"I—I spoke too soon," Featherstone said, after a short pause. "Please bring him back. Our worthy Chairman

is Sir Wilfred Wilberforce, you know. He's a very important person——"

"Bring him back? Certainly." Jupiter stretched out his hand. The Chairman faded into view once more, but instead of expressing gratitude for his restoration or answering the unspoken questions on the faces of Featherstone and Cranwell, he looked at the clock on the wall, and then said testily:

"Five past eleven. The service here gets worse and worse. Where is that girl with the tea? She's always late."

As he spoke, a door behind him opened and a girl came in carrying a tray of tea-things. Although—or perhaps because—she seemed to be painted all over in stripes of red, gold and blue that matched the colour-scheme of the tea-cups, she was dazzlingly beautiful, and Jupiter rose to his feet.

"Please sit down, Mr. Jupiter," said Featherstone. "It's only my daughter." He turned to the girl. "What's happened, Diana? Why are you doing this? You should be at your studies among the scientists."

The girl put down the tray, and began pouring out tea. "It's all right, Papa," she said calmly. "The maid wanted to go off in one of the saucers, so I said I'd do her work for the day."

"Saucers?"

"Flying saucers, Papa."

"Excuse me," said Jupiter. "What are these flying saucers? I'd like to know more about them."

Diana turned to him. "It's only one of the sillier ideas

of one of the sillier boffins. He thought that if he could only move fast enough, no one would be able to see him and he would win the prize."

"He's a menace," said Jupiter.

"He's a fool," said Diana warmly. "And the girl's a fool to go with him. No one but a fool can possibly think he can make himself invisible."

"You may be right, Miss Featherstone. Or on the other hand you may be wrong." And Jupiter again slowly faded from view, left a pause for effect, and slowly faded back. "If I win this prize," he said, noting with delight the amazement on her face, "will you think me a fool? Or will you help me to spend it?"

Diana rubbed her eyes. Then she giggled. "You're rather old," she said. "But I might. A million crowns——"

The Chairman rapped on the table. "When you've finished your conversation, Miss Featherstone, we'd like our tea. Mr. Jupiter and gentlemen, a cup of tea?"

"Thank you very much."

Diana finished pouring out the tea, handed it round, and retired to a seat at the end of the table, whence she watched Jupiter with concentrated interest. Sir Wilfred, too, displayed unfeigned curiosity as he gulped his tea and gazed unwinkingly at Jupiter over the edge of the cup.

"You gave me a very disagreeable sensation just then, Mr. Jupiter," he said at last. "I felt disembodied and detached and horribly ill. I'm not at all sure that your method of inducing invisibility can be regarded as acceptable. I really don't think it would make people

any happier, you know, to feel as dreadful as I did just then. Besides——”

Jupiter towered over him, his eyes gleaming. “Do you mean you’re ratting?” he demanded.

“Ratting? Oh, no, I wouldn’t say that. I——”

“You won’t say anything, my friend.” And Jupiter again touched him lightly on the hand. But this time the manner of his vanishing was more sensational. There was a flash and a roll as of thunder and he was gone.

“Really, Mr. Jupiter, I must protest.” Cranwell began struggling to his feet, but before he could do anything effective there was another flash, another thunderous roar, and he, too, was gone.

But though Featherstone now sat in fearful resignation, awaiting the fate that had befallen his colleagues, his daughter, who was made of tougher stuff, opened a drawer, took out a bunch of keys and threw them on the table. “There you are, Mr. Whatever your name is. You win. Those are the keys of the safe. It’s in the next room. The money’s in it. Go and take your million crowns.”

At this Jupiter laughed outright. “I admire your spirit, Miss Featherstone. An embryo scientist, too. We must get together some time. But . . . did you really think I wanted your million crowns?” He gestured towards the places where Sir Wilfred and Cranwell had been seated. They came gradually back into view. “Listen, all of you. I don’t want your money. Did you really think I would sell you the priceless gift of invisibility? What good would it do you? Your scientists

would only try to find a method of neutralising it—<sup>of</sup> seeing the invisible—and you would be back where you started. As Sir Wilfred says, it wouldn't make you any happier. You have robbed the individual of his personal privacy, without which there can be no true dignity and no true happiness. Your scientists have learned the inmost secrets of physical nature, but not those of ordinary human relationships. Yet, instead of liquidating them, you encourage them. You let them do what they will regardless of the after-effects." I saved you once before, but you have not learnt your lesson. It is a very simple one; in this complex world which you have made, everything you do has consequences far beyond the immediate ones. You still want to be happy, I suppose?"

Sir Wilfred, who had been listening intently, nodded. "Yes, of course. That's what this Committee exists for—the promotion of human happiness."

"Then let me give you a word of advice. If you want happiness, you must work for it. There is no short cut. You must weigh everything you do before doing it. Happiness is like Freedom; its price is eternal vigilance."

There was a long silence. Then, as the others watched, motionless and expectant, Jupiter and his companions were quite suddenly no longer there. At last Sir Wilfred roused himself. "I don't know who that was," he said, "but he was right. You cannot hitch-hike to Paradise. If you want to get there, you've got to pay your fare. . . . Tell all those people outside to go away, Diana, and then get all those notices taken down. And remind me to discuss with the Secretary-General of the



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Comity of World Peoples measures for the abolition of all scientists. I think that fellow's got something there. . . . Do you hear me, Diana?"

But Diana, too, had disappeared. Jupiter had touched her before going, and she had vanished with him. But unlike Sir Wilfred and Mr. Cranwell, she did not return. Perhaps after all it is sometimes permitted to a chosen few—even on occasion to a budding boffin—to travel free.

# *The Knitting*

MARGARET WOOD

SHE huddled a little closer into the confines of her chair, glad to be able to escape into the semi-shadow. The conversation began to slide away from her until Sheena started to draw her back into the family circle. "Don't you want to speak to them, Gran?" she said. Gran shook her head. She saw now that what they were all concentrating on was the Videophone. They were laughing and talking with Sam—in Brisbane. "Don't you want to speak with him?" Sheena asked again, turning momentarily in Gran's direction. Again Gran shook her head. "Give him my love," she said, "but I won't waste your time. You've got more to say than I have."

This was more true than they realised. Gran had to be honest with herself and admit that she wouldn't have known what on earth to say to Sam. She could hardly remember who he was—or rather, what he was. For she knew without doubt that he was her grandson, that he lived in Brisbane, was married, and had three children. It was what he was that puzzled her.

Over Sheena's shoulder she could see, reflected in the little discs, his animated face as, laughing, he exchanged

news and pleasantries with the group in the room. Oh yes, she knew who Sam was all right, but *what* was he? What made him different from Bert or Henry or James? She found the thought vaguely disturbing.

There was a faint click and the group round the Videophone broke up, splitting into its individual members. They were playing bridge now, sorting themselves out into two tables after a brief and polite glance of enquiry in her direction. They always gave her the option but she always smilingly refused, claiming, when pressed, that she enjoyed watching more than the game itself. It was odd that they were contented with this. Some strange naïvety in them allowed them to believe that all their pursuits were absorbing to the onlooker.

In fact nothing could have been more boring to watch than the bridge they played with such evident enjoyment. Motionless, unspeaking, they faced each other in pairs, their cards still held in front of them as they had been in her day. Yet the real battle was not fought at the table, but on the little panel on the wall. There, eight little black lines moving incessantly on a graph-like surface, recorded the projects and counter-projects of the eight individuals. It was no longer a game of skill but a game of will, the winners being those who could withhold most successfully their thought-sequence from the Recorder. The novelty of the contest had long since worn away for Gran. She liked, not so much the game as the chance of being left to herself.

Undoubtedly they were solicitous, this family of hers. They ministered to her every need, anticipated—some-

times a little too speedily—Gran thought wryly, for every need. When they did so much for her, it was difficult even to hint that she liked being alone sometimes. By chance at first, and with no intent really to deceive, had grown this convention that she enjoyed watching them play bridge.

At first she had not known what it was that she enjoyed. When she did know, she had been reluctant to admit it. For it had seemed a disloyalty to confess, even to herself, that she enjoyed a life separate from their own. The thought had frightened her by its implications. Without ever having worked it out logically she had arrived intuitively at the conclusion that to prefer the past would involve ostracism. So, she had done what any minority is forced to do; she had outwardly accepted things as they were, whilst keeping intact the inner core of her own thoughts. Not, she thought, meandering now down her own private avenue of speculation—that her acquiescence had not been perfectly genuine at the time. She had been able to accept their conventions gracefully because she was touched by the sincerity of their motives. And they were so confident, so secure, this new generation, that one didn't readily question the validity of their actions.

Nevertheless something vaguely disturbed her; something tantalisingly out of reach—a realisation that she often seemed on the point of making, but which never emerged as a definite idea. It troubled her especially to-night, because seeing Sam's face on the Videophone always disturbed her. For the first time she began to

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pursue this idea, instead of letting it flit in and out of her mind. She stopped knitting and one of the needles slipped down on to the floor with a slight, metallic sound.

The sound itself was reminiscent. It conjured up pictures of dozens of women busily knitting, some by the fire, some in garden sunshine; some placid, others chattering animatedly. Suddenly, with a rush of tenderness and nostalgia, Gran remembered her mother. And remembering, she was torn with sudden anguish. She would never see her mother again. Her mother was dead. She herself would not die. They had seen to all that, this clever generation. Death was no longer inevitable. A combination of drugs, therapy, and psychiatry kept death perpetually at bay. It was a triumph they had reason to be proud of.

Strangely enough, they didn't boast of it any longer. Now she came to think about it, they hardly ever referred to it. Death was not completely absent, of course. People still had accidents and babies couldn't always be guaranteed to live. But the families who encountered these disasters were rare. They were to be pitied—and as far as possible ignored.

Gran sat very still in her chair as this last thought came to her. It wasn't easy to grasp all at once. She had grown up with the idea that death was inevitable; dreadful perhaps and sometimes painful, but inescapable. She had never expected to see it outlawed, tabooed; something shaming that only evil-doers encountered.

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Slowly, as if seeing them for the first time, she regarded the faces of her children and grandchildren, still absorbed in their game. Her eyes travelled from Sheena's hair, haloed by the light, to the soft colouring of Diana's skin (or was it her cosmetique?). Then she studied the men: first James's firm jaw-line; then Henry's smooth black eyebrows—eyebrows that not half an hour before she had seen in the Videophone. For Henry and Sam were very much alike. *Alike!*

A swift intake of breath and a slight clenching of the hand resting on the arm of the chair were the only signs Gran dared permit herself that she was disturbed. The realisation that had evaded her for so long had suddenly materialised vividly. At last she had stumbled across it. She knew now why Sam's face seen in the Videophone had disturbed her. Sam's face was like Henry's, and like James's. Sheena's face was the same as Diana's and Kay's.

It wasn't that they were exactly alike, feature for feature. If that had been the case they would have noticed it themselves. They were alike because their expressions were alike; their expressions were alike because their reactions were the same. Sam, miles away in Brisbane, laughed at the same things, joked in the same way, spoke with the same inflections as Henry, in spite of the difference of climate and occupation. They had lost death, this clever generation, and with it they were rapidly losing personality. They were alive for longer but *less* alive. Individuality had nothing to grapple with, nothing on which to strengthen itself, so it was ebbing away too.

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*And they didn't know.* Their easy absorption, their complacency, horrified her now. Why couldn't they realise what they had done? Why weren't they clever enough to foresee the results of their cleverness? Why was it left for her to tell them what was happening? For now she must tell them. She couldn't stand idly by and see them gradually become . . . become *what*? Gran shivered. She didn't know the answer to that question, but she knew instinctively that it was distasteful. She was, accordingly, bound to point it out to her family. Only . . . would they believe her? Reluctantly she studied their faces again: Bert; Sheena; Kay; Henry.

She didn't complete the group. She couldn't fool herself even for a little while. It was so very obvious that they would not believe her. They would only think her mad. And mad people, if their madness persisted, were taken away for life. For life?—Endlessly!

Gran rubbed her forehead. It was damp. Her heart was racing. With startling clarity she saw that there was only one way out of this fantastic nightmare. She must die. She forced herself to pick up the needle and start knitting again. She must at all costs appear normal, must not attract attention to herself. Nothing could convey the appearance of well-being better than the knitting she held between her hands. In an age when all clothing was expertly fabricated, it was in itself useless, a personal idiosyncrasy that had become almost a joke—"Gran's antiquated hobby". Now she was profoundly thankful that she had persisted with it. From long practice she could knit instinctively, giving to the uninitiated the

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impression of being absorbed in her work while her thoughts were elsewhere.

Her thoughts at this moment were certainly elsewhere. She was absorbed with the idea of death; reliving with all the accuracy she could command, the details of those deaths that she had personally witnessed. On the whole they were not very helpful, for most of them had been the result of some illness. There was, of course, Cousin Henry who had died suddenly of heart failure—heart failure as a result of shock.

A sudden titillating sense of excitement began to creep over Gran. Hadn't she herself just received a shock? She was conscious of the blood drumming persistently in her neck, of her cheeks feeling warm, of her heart racing, stopping with a jerk, racing again. Her excitement mounted until a sort of exaltation began to take possession of her. This wasn't anything to be afraid of. Life was meant to have a physical ending, and if this was how the end came she had no fault to find with it.

She was suddenly aware of activity. Someone had risen with a sharp exclamation. Someone else had uttered her name. Angrily, reluctantly, Gran turned to look at her family. In doing so her eye encountered the panel on the wall. The black lines were no longer visible; instead a single, straight red line glowed across it. By this she knew that her own thoughts had intruded into their game. Her excitement had made her forget the need for caution, and the Recorder had picked up her unsympathetic thoughts and given a warning that someone else had seen.



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It was Sheena who was bending over her, speaking in soothing tones that didn't entirely mask the fear in her face. When she spoke to the others the fear was in her voice too. "Hurry, Henry," Gran heard her say, "she's very bad."

A pair of cool hands lifted Gran's wrist and in spite of her attempts at resistance she felt the jab of a hypodermic. Almost simultaneously something was placed over her head. She knew then that she was beaten. There was the click of a switch and then she was conscious of a faint tingling sensation in her scalp. The Rejuvenator was at work. Slowly the excitement, the sense of impending discovery and achievement that she had been enjoying subsided. Gran felt a reassuring warmth, a peaceful drowsiness begin to take its place. Anger at this unwanted intrusion blazed up inside her. She longed to wrench the helmet off her head and hurl it on the floor, but she was powerless to resist its calming influence.

Tears of humiliation and rage coursed down her cheeks and sobs shook her soundlessly. Sheena took her hand. "It's all right now, Gran," she said. This time her voice really was reassuring; the fear had left her face. "It's not easy for us to understand," Sheena went on, talking now in a low voice to Henry, "just how terrified she must be when this happens. She remembers the others . . . it must be difficult to believe that it needn't happen to her, in spite of all our promises. What a lucky thing Kay saw the light in time; I keep telling Gran not to leave it too long if she wants help,

but I don't think she really knows how reliable the Rejuvenator is. If we could only impress that on her, she would have no need to worry."

Gran closed her eyes. She made a determined effort not to resent the touch of Shecna's fingers on her wrist any longer. From now on she must learn to be a good loser; she must accept defeats graciously. It would never do to make them suspicious of her motives; if that happened all would be lost.

Summoning all her will-power she opened her eyes, looked at Henry, and smiled. His response was immediate. He leant forward, patted her hand, and said, "Feeling better? Would you like to go to your room and rest?" For reply Gran shook her head. "No. I'm better now. I'd like to stay here with you, if you don't mind," she said. Murmurs of approval greeted this statement. Pleased, flattered, confident, the family began to relax and to talk again. One or two of them drifted back to the tables. Seeing this, Gran smiled again.

"Please do go on with your game," she said. "It was so interesting and I'm sorry I interrupted you." As she spoke she settled back in her chair and fixed her eyes on the cards expectantly. Convinced that all was well, and wishing to humour her, the others began to play bridge again. The panel on the wall glowed, the little black lines began to thread their way across it.

Gran's hand felt for her knitting, patted it, placed it in her lap. She gripped it as one greeting an old, familiar friend, or like a person making a pledge. It had been a near thing. She might almost have lost her last

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chance. But the lesson had not been wasted. In future she must learn to control herself a little more. People playing for high stakes couldn't afford to waste their chances. Surrounded as she was by people who believed in living for ever, she would need to have her wits about her in order to die successfully.

# *Man Manifold*

PETER YOUNG

ISO HAAF pressed his new left arm down his side to its fullest extent so that the unworked fingers with their pink nails just reached to the top of his hip. Framed in the narrow corridor of the mirror he saw himself as a child's arm to which was attached a grotesquely elephantine figure.

Momentarily he remembered the specialist at the prosthetic clinic: "It will be a few weeks before you have control over it. Have to let the patterns of 170,000,000 years work themselves out—amphibian, reptile and mammal. Voluntary control will come at about the tenth week—of course it's as many months with a child." Then he had added: "If the arm distracts you a light hypnosis might help. We can't inhibit the limb without delaying its growth, but we can always inhibit consciousness of its movements." That was two months ago.

Now as he flinched at his reflection he wondered whether he had been wise to reject hypnosis. When he had discussed the matter with Ethos they had agreed that he could not function adequately as architect of the

Lambassa City project if a part of his mind was outside his conscious control. He had suggested that he could wait for his new arm until the project was completed. On their part Ethos had been quite prepared to delay the project until his arm had grown.

But enthusiasm, and inherent obstinacy, had prevailed. The mirror told him the small-change of the price he was paying, the strained eyes and the lack of muscle-tone in his whole body. He braced himself, and the appearance of strain increased. On his lips he could taste the sweetness of the thumb which had wandered so many times to his mouth.

In disgust he turned from the mirror. He realised that to stretch his arm down to its limit and gaze into the mirror to see if it had grown had become a tic, as though each new problem that arose could only be answered in the mirror. And he now knew that the full price of his impatient decision might prove to be the abortion of the entire project. The city would be built here on the plateau above the Congo, but it would be but a shadow of his original conception.

He walked back to his work-space with the hedges and vines tumbling over a sheet of levitated glass, and the bank of machines and viewing panels in the shade of their awning of undulating feathers suspended on an air-stream. Below was the steam of the jungle, and before him the sheet of ice covering the lake winked back the reflection of the conifers. Spanning the shallow saucer of the plateau floated the transparent roof, only visible

to the eyes where the sun caught its chamfered edge.

He watched the recapitulation of the data compiled for him during the afternoon. Then he netted-in his neuro-wave receiver to the thoughts of his syndicate of architects, planners and engineers.

"Thermal insulation for section SA . . . possible heat loss at aperture? . . ." That was a typical misgiving on Ben Avar's part, he reflected, and sent him a tabulated schedule to set his mind at rest.

"Soil analysis report very pretty . . . ship out the lot and restock with sterilised sand for drip-feed control . . . damn expense . . . taking a holiday at Oaxaca . . . why not anthemis nobilis for the exits?" Lao Chi could be relied upon for almost scorpionic inspiration, his mind working in minute eddies to a wave of original thought.

Iso Haaf wished he could maintain indefinitely his passive role in the neuro-wave network. Perhaps that was the answer: to hold a watching brief now that the initial planning was over. He was aware of the way in which his own thoughts had slowed the tempo of creative thought in the syndicate. He thrust the arm down into his waistband and concentrated:

"Traffic resistance of camomile good . . . satisfactory recuperation periods of 5 in 24 hours . . . check side-effects of aroma. . . ." Then to Fulakah, who was engineering remote solar control units and studying the clime-suit problem; for they knew that, no matter how subtle they made their climatic gradations, the future inhabitants would cling to their individual clime-suits.

Haaf's synæsthetic mind moved through the maze of detail.

"Reject all miscast computations and finalise all visual checks for 5.30. . . . Develop radials to 400 m. for climatic controls . . . grade through subtropic on escarpment to mediterranean régime . . ." He felt the vision of the city return, the images flow and crystalise. And then, as suddenly as it had come, the vision suffused in mauve night, and the bones of an Ozymandian city lay strewn across waves of sand. His arm gesticulated and he captured it with his right hand.

With alarm he realised that Lao Chi was discussing with Ethos, at La Paz, the ethno-ethical reasons for maintaining the Kabbasimi—the indigenous race of mixed pygmy and Bantu origin—in their present location below the plateau. A fascinating topic, no doubt, but outside the terms of reference of the syndicate. Meanwhile, Fulakah, himself the grandson of Galavami, the President of the Kabbasimi, was studying changes in the evaporation rate along the three basins radiating from the lake. Fulakah, he recognised, regarded the question of the Kabbasimi with dispassionate and purely academic interest, knowing that they would stay or move if they wished. He had been brought to La Paz as a child, to be cured of cerebral palsy, and had remained to become a promising solar engineer. But why was he suddenly pre-occupied with this piece of minutia?

Haaf realised that only Ben Avar's thoughts had tracked his own. Fulakah and Chi were pursuing these side-issues solely because once more he had introduced

elements into the thought processes of his syndicate which had disrupted their creative thinking. A new fear brought the sweat out all over him.

At that moment he heard Ethos switched through to him. As he listened to the gently intimate voice five reports arrived from the site. He tried to glance through them as he listened, but found it impossible to divide his attention. The voice murmured precisely, "Item: Supplies by stratofreight delayed 3 mins. Item: All units of your neuro-wave network indicate epidemic condition of lethargy with danger of neurasthenia developing. Analysis shows you are radiating spurious elements. As you are aware of the dangers there is no need to stress that you are responsible for your thoughts both to yourself and to your syndicate. If condition persists consult Ethos Section P7."

He acknowledged the report and flicked out his neuro-wave, alone now with his thoughts which wavered in the air as a spiral spring released from tension. His lips felt the thumb of his new arm insinuating itself into his lips and he spat it out. No, there was no need for stress: he had lost his arm when a levitated sheet of metal had been released from control by a technician whose neuro-wave receiver had induced in him the same dissociation of interest to which he was now subject.

Haaf's fear was not of accidents. His was a greater fear: that this demon accidie would pervert and ruin the project, would spread at first innocuously until each member of the syndicate lost full conscious control of the nuances of his ideas, formulations, images, concepts,



thoughts. He felt the fingers open and close, open and close. Why had he not waited? If he could not now cast out the poison he would have to resign. That was not a decision he could take lightly or alone. Again he felt the paralysis of boredom swathe his mind.

The reports requested for 5.30 came in. He posted them on their matrixes and awaited the day's finalisation report. The visual indicator blinked and across the panel appeared, "Checks confirm forecasts. No progress."

Stalemate. He wanted to expunge the day from the record, to throw himself into a fever of activity and drag up the dipping line of the graph. But he knew that already in the department of Ethos concerned with the project heads would be shaking sagely. Not one contribution from the entire syndicate which had not been neutralised by the lassitude within him.

What was there in his mind, he pondered, which dammed the free flow of his thoughts, pinning them into stagnant predetermined canals? A few days previously he had worked with his usual verve and precision. Even the turtle-like movements of his arm had not distracted him. Now, a torpor as debilitating as the jungle below, permeated his entire being; an ennui, so intense that if he surrendered to it he would destroy his city, engulfed him so completely that he began to doubt his will to fight it.

Haaf was the last to arrive in the formal garden where his syndicate ate. He crossed the patio to sit with

Fulakah who had beckoned him to his table as he entered.

Fulakah passed the bowl of fruit to him and poured warm water into his glass.

"The site reports are encouraging," he said.

"Yes." Haaf turned to face the lithe brown figure at his side. "Soon we shall be holding them up."

"Why not take a rest, Iso? You're not doing your arm any good."

"Not to mention the project." Haaf found it easier to talk than to think, one simple idea in its expression could blot out innumerable thoughts.

"Mind you," said Fulakah, "I don't think the arm's at the root of the trouble. . . ."

"What then?"

"I don't pretend to know. Perhaps your denial of its growth. . . ." He laughed, then added, "What are you doing to-night? Ben Avar and Chi are spending the evening in Rangoon. I thought of going to see my people."

"I'd like to join you. You're not opposed to policy?"

"Heavens no! I want to see my uncle. Come by all means. Grandfather Galavami, not to mention Lamalla, will be delighted. Lamalla is his second wife—she was away at the time of our official visit."

They finished their meal and left the gardens, pausing to wave to Lao Chi who was leading a kolo. The ring of chanting dancers wove in, out and around the cascading flower-beds. Haaf looked at Fulakah as he stood there waving and envied him his empathy with the dancers.

Together they walked towards the clearing with its rows of primitive bungalows, conscious of the air heavy with insects and the noises of the jungle night.

Fulakah led him to the largest bungalow in the centre of the clearing, and as they approached, Galavami, his young wife Lamalla at his side, came out on the veranda to greet them. A tall, patriarch of a man, the President was clearly delighted that his grandson had brought Haaf with him. As soon as his guests were seated he started to question them about their city with enthusiasm. Fulakah stopped him with a gesture of mock derision:

"No, President Galavami, we have not come on state business—I want to see my uncle," he told him.

Galavami's laughter filled the room. "Very well, my boy! Lamalla, take him to his uncle."

Haaf followed them to the screen. Craning his head over them he saw the glistening brown of the babe against the white of its coverlet, its eyes looking up at them at first sleepily and then wide awake. Lamalla picked up the child and presented him to Fulakah, and together they sat down on the brightly-coloured mats grouped in the centre of the room. Glad of the diversion Haaf relaxed into enjoyment of this domestic scene, secure in a situation in which he was in no way involved.

Suddenly he felt the child pulling on his thigh. He bent to pick it up on to his lap. Then stopped. He felt the sweat break out over him again, his face taut. He realised the others had stopped talking and were looking at him. With two hands he picked up the child and rolled back with him on to his chest.

"The arm went out to him too," he called to Fulakah. "Look at the little boulder now!" The infant, astride Haaf's chest, was hungrily sucking the thumb of the new arm. "I'll have to take him back with me, Lamalla!" he shouted above the violent scrabbling of the child.

"Oh, you've a new arm growing—and I hadn't noticed!" she exclaimed.

It was late when they left. Galavami had entertained them with his stories of his people and of the jungle that fascinated and fashioned them. For them he had no fears: those who wished to stay did so because they chose to stay, and in choosing, chose what he chose. Those who left for the new city would go with his regrets, yet with his hopes. But of Fulakah he was secretly proud, and goaded him with his wit the more for it.

In silence Haaf and Fulakah climbed together out of the humid jungle air and on to the rim of the plateau. Standing there now, filling their lungs with the oxygenised air to which they were accustomed, they gazed out across the empty amphitheatre they had created to hold their city.

Haaf saw it now. A vast emptiness to be filled, not with his dreams or thoughts, not with techniques and skills, nor with the barriers to man's fears or the projections of his fantasies, but with the vitality of man. He felt the wind blowing through the interstices of the city, the air sharp with the tang of flowers' scent and of voices; heard the lambent arches spring in colour across the sky; an æolian harp of a city, freed of

function, poised in the sun between the poles and space ;  
a city alive with people,

Iso Haaf pressed his new left arm down to his hip, looked in the mirror, and laughed. To-morrow, perhaps, he would lead a kolo. He waved his arm, and in the corridor of the mirror a man erect waved to him with the arm of a child. .

